Every day the opportunity for leadership stands before you.

- A father gets drawn into the same old destructive argument at the dinner table, but one day breaks out of the pattern and seeks family counseling.

- An investment banker nearly closes a $100 billion acquisition, but confounds everyone by putting the whole deal at risk when she asks, “Can these companies create synergies fast enough to satisfy the investors, given the current talent and different cultures within each of the businesses?”

- A politician challenges constituents to accept responsibility for locating a prison in their community, rather than chant the same old slogan, “Not in our backyard!”

- A neighbor watches the nice kid down the street getting lost in his teenage years long after his mother dies, and organizes a weekly coffee for parents in the neighborhood in order to provide support for the father and his family.

- You sit through a meeting, watching people avoid the real issues, and decide that you will be the one who puts them on the table.
Each day brings you opportunities to raise important questions, speak to higher values, and surface unresolved conflicts. Every day you have the chance to make a difference in the lives of people around you.

And every day you must decide whether to put your contribution out there, or keep it to yourself to avoid upsetting anyone, and get through another day. You are right to be cautious. Prudence is a virtue. You disturb people when you take unpopular initiatives in your community, put provocative new ideas on the table in your organization, question the gap between colleagues' values and behavior, or ask friends and relatives to face up to tough realities. You risk people’s ire and make yourself vulnerable. Exercising leadership can get you into a lot of trouble.

To lead is to live dangerously because when leadership counts, when you lead people through difficult change, you challenge what people hold dear—their daily habits, tools, loyalties, and ways of thinking—with nothing more to offer perhaps than a possibility. Moreover, leadership often means exceeding the authority you are given to tackle the challenge at hand. People push back when you disturb the personal and institutional equilibrium they know. And people resist in all kinds of creative and unexpected ways that can get you taken out of the game: pushed aside, undermined, or eliminated.

It is no wonder that when the myriad opportunities to exercise leadership call, you often hesitate. Anyone who has stepped out on the line, leading part or all of an organization, a community, or a family, knows the personal and professional vulnerabilities. However gentle your style, however careful your strategy, however sure you may be that you are on the right track, leading is risky business.

This book is about taking opportunities to lead, and staying alive. We ask these fundamental questions: Why and how is leadership dangerous? How can you respond to these dangers? And how can you keep your spirit alive when the going gets very tough? We are both straightforward about the hazards of leadership and idealistic about the importance of taking these risks. Many leadership books are all about inspiration, but downplay the perspiration. We respect how tough this work is. We know too many people with scars to show for their efforts. We have scars ourselves and harbor no illusions.

Yet we believe that leadership, while perilous, is an enterprise worthy of the costs. Our communities, organizations, and societies need people, from wherever they work and live, to take up the challenges within reach rather than complain about the lack of leadership from on high, hold off until they receive a "call" to action, or wait for their turn in the top job. This has always been true, but may especially be so now, in the post-September 11, 2001 world of uncertainty and vulnerability.

Meeting these challenges need not entail getting put down or pushed aside, personally or professionally. To adapt a phrase from Johnny Cash, we believe you can "walk the line," step forward, make a difference, take the heat, and survive to delight in the fruits of your labor.

Leadership is worth the risk because the goals extend beyond material gain or personal advancement. By making the lives of people around you better, leadership provides meaning in life. It creates purpose. We believe that every human being has something unique to offer, and that a larger sense of purpose comes from using that gift to help your organizations, families, or communities thrive. The gift might be your knowledge, your experience, your values, your presence, your heart, or your wisdom. Perhaps it's simply your basic curiosity and your willingness to raise unsettling questions.

So, first and foremost, this book is about you, about how to survive and thrive amidst the dangers of leadership. It's also about getting more out of life by putting more into it. We've written it for those of you who play it safe because you can't imagine stepping out or speaking up without getting burned, as well as for the risk-takers among you who know what it's like to get shot down when you challenge people to change. This book is about putting yourself and your ideas on the line, responding effectively to the risks, and living to celebrate the meaning of your efforts.
This book is about our times, too. We live in a period in history when taking on the risks of leadership in your individual world is both more important and more complicated than ever before. Globalization of the economy, the necessary interaction of cultures, and ready access to information and communication through the Internet make interdependence palpable. Hierarchical structures with clearly defined rules are giving way to more horizontal organizations with greater flexibility, room for initiative, and corresponding uncertainty. Democratization is spreading throughout organizations as well as countries. All of these movements create new opportunities for you to make a difference.

This book is also about us, Ron and Marty. We have been colleagues and friends for nearly twenty years, working and teaching together; sharing our research and experience; and exploring, testing, and refining our ideas about the demands of leadership in modern life. The more we talk and work together, the more we find our experiences and insights overlap. Ron draws inferences about how the world works from music and psychiatry, and Marty from media and politics. What do these four diverse fields have to do with leadership? Music is about moving people, about striking chords that resonate deeply in the hearts of listeners. It provides a language for elusive but central qualities like harmony, resolution, timing, improvisation, creativity, and inspiration. Politics teaches that no one can accomplish anything of significance alone; the more challenging the problem, the more the people who will bear the consequences of its solution must take responsibility for working on it. Psychiatry opens up a greater understanding of the way humans contend with challenges, individually and collectively, and the media make us aware that the way the message is delivered and the identity of the messenger can often seem as important to making progress as the message itself. Perspectives and lessons from these and other disciplines will, we hope, add depth and color.

As consultants, we work with clients from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. As teachers, we work in and out of the classroom with hundreds of students at the John F. Kennedy School of Govern-
In Part Three, we discuss ways that people contribute to their own demise. We offer ideas about critical, though often neglected, aspects of exercising leadership: how to manage your personal vulnerabilities, care for yourself, and sustain your spirit.

Leadership opportunities beckon daily. We hope these lessons will help you put yourself on the line and stay alive, not only in your job, but also in your family and community, and in your heart and soul.
Maggie Brooke grew up on a small Native American reservation in which nearly everyone older than twelve drank alcohol. After sobering up in her twenties, she spent more than a decade leading her people toward health. Now a grandmother in her forties and a tribal elder, Maggie counsels a steady stream of visitors in her home throughout the day. One evening, she told her visitor about Lois, the woman who first inspired her to try to do something about the alcohol dependency among her people.

"Twenty years ago I used to baby-sit for Lois, who lived in a neighboring band within our tribe. Once a week I'd go the few miles to her community and take care of Lois's little ones. But after about two months, I started to wonder, 'What could Lois possibly be doing every Tuesday night? There's not much to do around here in these villages.' So one evening after Lois left to go to the meeting lodge, I packed up the children and went over to the lodge to find out what she was doing. We looked through a window into the lodge and saw a big circle of chairs, all neatly in place, with Lois sitting in a chair all by herself. The chairs in the circle were empty.

"I was really curious, you know, so when Lois came home that evening, I asked her, 'Lois, what are you doing every Tuesday night?"
And she said, 'I thought I told you weeks ago, I've been holding AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) meetings.' So I asked her back, 'What do you mean you're holding meetings? I went over there tonight with the children and looked through the window. We watched you sitting there in that circle of chairs, all alone.'

"Lois got quiet—I wasn’t alone," she said. "I was there with the spirits and the ancestors; and one day, our people will come."

Lois never gave up. "Every week Lois set up those chairs neatly in a circle, and for two hours, she just sat there," Maggie recalled. "No one came to those meetings for a long time, and even after three years, there were only a few people in the room. But ten years later, the room was filled with people. The community began turning around. People began ridding themselves of alcohol. I felt so inspired by Lois that I couldn’t sit still watching us poison ourselves."

Lois and then Maggie worked on becoming sober themselves, and then challenged their friends, families, and neighbors to change and renew their lives, too. Leading these communities required extraordinary self-examination, perseverance, and courage. Their native history was full of people, some of them with goodwill, who had forced tribes to give up familiar and reliable ways, and now these communities were being asked to change again, with no reason to think that things would get much better. Lois and Maggie were asking people to face the trade-offs between the numbing solace of alcohol and the hard work of renewing their daily lives. There would be no progress until they had put alcohol dependency behind them. But people found it extremely difficult to give up their way of coping, particularly for some intangible idea about the future. They had fought back before when others had made them change their ways, and they fought Lois and Maggie.

The two women were mocked and marginalized. They spent years feeling out of place in their own communities, unwelcome at parties and gatherings where alcohol flowed, so ostracized that even holidays became lonely, solitary events. Indeed, for long stretches of time they spent weekends off the reservation to find people they could talk to. They had put themselves at risk, as well as key relationships with neighbors, friends, and family. Eventually, they succeeded and survived. But for a long time, they could not know. They could have lost everything."

The Heart of Danger

In the early 1990s, Yitzhak Rabin, then prime minister of Israel, had been moving the country toward an accommodation with the Palestinians. Slowly but surely Rabin was bringing a majority of Israelis along with him. But he also had deeply disturbed the right wing in Israel, particularly the religious right, by his success in getting the community to wrestle with the difficult and painful trade-offs between long-term peace and territory. The right wing refused to face the reality that they would have to give up land they considered sacred for peace. They tried to debate the issue, but they were losing the argument. So they began to make Rabin himself the issue, rather than his policies. The result was Rabin's assassination, a tragedy, as well as a terrible setback for his initiatives. His successor, Benjamin Netanyahu, retreated, unwilling to push the Israeli people to face the costs of peace. Indeed, the period before Rabin's death marked a high point in the willingness of the Israeli people to decide, among deeply held values, which were most precious and which could be left behind.

Assassinations are extreme examples of what people will do to silence the voices of frustrating realities. Asking an entire community to change its ways, as Lois and Maggie succeeded in doing and Yitzhak Rabin sacrificed himself in attempting, is dangerous. If leadership were about giving people good news, the job would be easy. If Lois had been gathering people every week to distribute money or to sing their praises, the chairs would not have stayed empty for so long. If Rabin had promised peace with no loss of land, he might have survived. People do not resist change, per se. People resist loss.
You appear dangerous to people when you question their values, beliefs, or habits of a lifetime. You place yourself on the line when you tell people what they need to hear rather than what they want to hear. Although you may see with clarity and passion a promising future of progress and gain, people will see with equal passion the losses you are asking them to sustain.

Think about the times you have had something important to say and have pulled back, when you have tried and failed, or succeeded but were bruised along the way. Or when you have watched the trials and successes of other people. The hope of leadership lies in the capacity to deliver disturbing news and raise difficult questions in a way that people can absorb, prodding them to take up the message rather than ignore it or kill the messenger.

As a doctor, Ron faced this challenge every day. Every patient looks to the doctor, hoping for a painless remedy; and every day doctors have to tell people that their health depends on enduring the pains of change—in giving up their favorite foods, taking time out of each overextended day for exercise, taking medications that have side effects, or breaking an addiction to cigarettes, alcohol, or work. Ron saw a few doctors who were artists of the profession as well as technical experts. They had learned how to engage patients and their families in reshaping their values, attitudes, and long-standing habits. But this was demanding and risky. Discussions can backfire if they seem unfeeling or abrupt, and angry patients can find a variety of ways to damage a doctor's reputation. Ron saw many more doctors give little more than lip service to this part of their job, all the while complaining about patient noncompliance—a term doctors use to describe people's resistance to taking medicine and advice. In frustration, they would say to themselves, "Why do people avoid facing reality and resist following my instructions?" But then they would take the easy road, playing it safe by pandering to the desire for a technical fix, avoiding the difficult conversations rather than disturbing people in an attempt to change the ways they lived.

Lois, Maggie, and Rabin had to engage people in facing a hard reality, just as patients hope to receive a doctor's fast and painless cure, some Native Americans might place all their hopes on a new casino or look for a technical explanation for their pains (a genetic predisposition to alcoholism). And most every Israeli would prefer to have peace without giving up any of their ancient homeland. In each case—the patient, the Native American community, the Israeli people—people must face the challenge of adapting to a tough reality, and the adaptation requires giving up an important value or a current way of life. Leadership becomes dangerous, then, when it must confront people with loss. Rabin, Lois, Maggie, and the best doctors mobilize change by challenging people to answer a core but painful question: Of all that we value, what's really most precious and what's expendable?

The Perils of Adaptive Change

Leadership would be a safe undertaking if your organizations and communities only faced problems for which they already knew the solutions. Every day, people have problems for which they do, in fact, have the necessary know-how and procedures. We call these technical problems. But there is a whole host of problems that are not amenable to authoritative expertise or standard operating procedures. They cannot be solved by someone who provides answers from on high. We call these adaptive challenges because they require experiments, new discoveries, and adjustments from numerous places in the organization or community. Without learning new ways—changing attitudes, values, and behaviors—people cannot make the adaptive leap necessary to thrive in the new environment. The sustainability of change depends on having the people with the problem internalize the change itself.

People cannot see at the beginning of the adaptive process that the new situation will be any better than the current condition. What they do see clearly is the potential for loss. People frequently avoid painful adjustments in their lives if they can postpone them, place the burden on somebody else, or call someone to the rescue.
When fears and passions run high, people can become desperate as they look to authorities for the answers. This dynamic renders adaptive contexts inherently dangerous.

When people look to authorities for easy answers to adaptive challenges, they end up with dysfunction. They expect the person in charge to know what to do, and under the weight of that responsibility, those in authority frequently end up faking it or disappointing people, or they get spit out of the system in the belief that a new “leader” will solve the problem. In fact, there's a proportionate relationship between risk and adaptive change: The deeper the change and the greater the amount of new learning required, the more resistance there will be and, thus, the greater the danger to those who lead. For this reason, people often try to avoid the dangers, either consciously or subconsciously, by treating an adaptive challenge as if it were a technical one. This is why we see so much more routine management than leadership in our society.

The table, "Distinguishing Technical from Adaptive Challenges," captures the difference between the technical work of routine management and the adaptive work of leadership.

Indeed, the single most common source of leadership failure we’ve been able to identify—in politics, community life, business, or the nonprofit sector—is that people, especially those in positions of authority, treat adaptive challenges like technical problems.

In times of distress, when everyone looks to authorities to provide direction, protection, and order, this is an easy diagnostic mistake to make. In the face of adaptive pressures, people don’t want questions; they want answers. They don’t want to be told that they will have to sustain losses; rather, they want to know how you’re going to protect them from the pains of change. And of course you want to fulfill their needs and expectations, not bear the brunt of their frustration and anger at the bad news you’re giving.

In mobilizing adaptive work, you have to engage people in adjusting their unrealistic expectations, rather than try to satisfy them as if the situation were amenable primarily to a technical remedy. You have to counteract their exaggerated dependency and promote their resourcefulness. This takes an extraordinary level of presence, time, and artful communication, but it may also take more time and trust than you have.

This was the box Ecuador’s president Jamil Mahuad found himself in early in January 2000, when he faced the prospect of mass demonstrations, with thousands of indigenous Ecuadorians mobilizing to throw him out of office. His popularity had fallen from 70 percent approval to 15 percent in less than a year. With the country in the midst of a catastrophic and rapid economic meltdown, on the eve of the demonstrations Mahuad said he felt trapped. "I’ve lost my connection with the people.”

One year before, he had been a hero, a peacemaker. In his first months in office, he ended a war with Peru that had lasted more than two hundred years, signing a peace treaty with great excitement in the air. But his heroic accomplishments were to be washed away within less than four months by the effects of numerous natural and economic disasters: El Niño storms, which devastated 16 percent of Ecuador’s gross domestic product, the financial crisis that swept through East Asia and then Latin America, high inflation, crushing foreign debt, bankrupt banks, the lowest oil prices since Ecuador had started to export oil, and a political culture that had brought down four presidents in eight years. On January 21, 2000, a coalition of military officers and indigenous demonstrators forced Mahuad out of office, another casualty of the country's ongoing crisis.

Mahuad described the contrast between being mayor of Quito and president of the entire country. As mayor, the people welcomed him openly as he walked daily around town. During his walks, he

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could often get people to cooperate to solve their own problems, or he could apply a little pressure and resources to help out. As mayor, he had the advantage that people looked for local solutions to local problems, and worked with him. He was in touch with them and they with him.

However, when he became president and had responsibility for the national economic crisis, the people wanted him to find remedies for which other regions and localities would pay the costs. The people did not want him to tell them they had to change. He made several trips abroad to plead for help from the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and U.S. Treasury. He consulted many worthy economic experts at home, in Latin America generally, in the United States, and in Europe. He came to see that any practical solution would require each region and sector of his society to endure considerable pain, at least in the short run.

Mahuad said afterward, "I felt like a doctor in an emergency ward on a Saturday night. And the patient came in with a badly damaged and gangrenous leg. And, from my medical experience, I had to amputate the patient’s leg to save the patient’s life. The family said, 'You don’t have to amputate.' I insisted on amputation to save the patient’s life, but I lost the confidence of the family. The family held me responsible for the patient’s problem."

As president, he grew increasingly distant from his various publics as he faced rising hostility and focused most of his attention on finding the right economic policy to reverse the downturn. Yet his trip to Washington yielded no assistance. Countless conversations with policy experts prompted a variety of prescriptions, but no clear way out of the quagmire. Meanwhile, poor people in the villages found the price of food rising beyond their reach. Many flocked to the cities, selling their wares on the streets. As inflation soared, the unions became furious at the lost value of paychecks. The business sector lost faith, sending their money north to the U.S. and hastening the insolvency of the banks.

Mahuad made bold moves in response to the crisis. Ecuador would cut government salaries, reduce conscription into the army, cancel orders for the purchase of military equipment, default on its loans, freeze bank balances to stop the run on the banks and the draining of foreign currency reserves, and finally, convert its currency to the dollar.

Yet the adaptive challenge was enormous. Even under the rosiest scenarios, there would be further job loss, more rising prices, and increased uncertainty before people would feel the benefits of an economic turnaround. The most brilliant policy solution, coupled with a rise in the price of oil, would not have stopped the ongoing disruption caused by opening the economy to a more competitive world.

Although Mahuad worked tirelessly to halt the falling economy, ironically, the public felt that he had disengaged. They were right in one sense: He had disengaged from them. To use his metaphor, he had performed the amputation because it was the best of the available options, but he did not prepare the family for what they would have to endure. Many surgeons could have done the amputation, but only Mahuad, as president, could have helped the family face their situation. Spending most of his time working through the issues and options with technical experts and trying every means available to persuade foreign creditors for assistance, Mahuad paid less attention to his political colleagues and to the people on the streets and in the villages. In retrospect, he might have let his technical experts in the ministries do all of the technical work so that he could focus heavily on the political and adaptive work. Instead, looking back at his weekly calendar, Mahuad realized he had spent more than 65 percent of his time working in a technical problem-solving mode and less than 35 percent of his time working with the politicians and public groups with direct stakes in the situation. Rather than using every day as an opportunity to be a visible champion to his people—to provide hope and to explain the process and pains of modernization in a globalizing economy—he devoted most of his time to searching for the right policy solution and then attempting to get the people to be reasonable in accepting the necessary technical fixes. Although he recognized the adaptive
challenges, he hoped to find a short-term remedy that would give him time to deal with them.²

Clearly, the odds were badly stacked against him. But when you focus your energy primarily on the technical aspects of complex challenges, you do opt for short-term rewards. Sometimes by doing so you might strategically buy some time to deal with the adaptive elements. But you might use up precious time and find yourself, like Mahuad, running out of it anyway. In a far less demanding crisis, you may make people happy for a while, but over time you risk your credibility and perhaps your job. Reality may catch up with you as people discover that they are unprepared for the world in which they now live. And though they ought to blame themselves for sticking their heads in the sand and pressuring you to sanction their behavior, it's much more likely they'll blame you.

When you are in a position of authority, there are also strong internal pressures to focus on the technical aspects of problems. Most of us take pride in our ability to answer the tough questions that are thrown our way. We get rewarded for bearing people's uncertainty and want to be seen in a competent, heroic light. We like the feeling of stepping up to the plate and having the crowds cheer us on. Yet raising questions that go to the core of people's habits goes unrewarded, at least for a while. You get booed instead of cheered. In fact, it may be a long time before you hear any applause—if ever. They may throw tomatoes. They may shoot bullets. Leadership takes the capacity to stomach hostility so that you can stay connected to people, lest you disengage from them and exacerbate the danger.

There is nothing trivial about solving technical problems. Medical personnel save lives every day in the emergency room through their authoritative expertise because they have the right procedures, the right norms, and the right knowledge. Through our managerial know-how, we produce an economy full of products and services, many of them crucial to our daily lives. What makes a problem technical is not that it is trivial; but simply that its solution already lies within the organization's repertoire. In contrast, adaptive pressures force the organization to change, lest it decline.

In the twenty-first century, people and organizations face adaptive pressures every day, in their individual lives and at all levels of society; and each leadership opportunity to respond to these challenges also carries with it attendant risks. For example, when your car breaks down, you go to a mechanic. Most of the time, the mechanic can fix it. However, if the car breaks down because of the way members of the family use it, the problem will probably happen again. The mechanic might be able to get the car on the road once more. But by continuing to deal with it as a purely technical problem a mechanic can solve, the family may end up avoiding the underlying issues demanding adaptive work, such as how to persuade the mother to stop drinking and driving, or the grandfather to give up his driver's license, or the teenagers to be more cautious. No doubt, any family member would find it difficult and risky to step forward and lead the prickly conversations with the mother, grandfather, or even the teenage driver.

The terrorism of September 11, 2001, brought home to the United States an adaptive challenge that has been festering for a very long time. With the unthinkable destruction of the World Trade Center, Americans felt a new vulnerability. In response, the initial tendency of the U.S. government was to reduce terrorism to a technical problem of security systems, military and police operations, and criminal justice. But terrorism represents an adaptive challenge to our civil liberties, our mindset of invulnerability, and our capacity to narrow the divide between Christian West and Muslim East that began with the Crusades one thousand years ago. Should we trust government officials with information that we consider private, in the interest of our collective security? Can we accept the undeniable reality that we live in an interdependent world in which safety must primarily be found in the health of our relationships with very different cultures? Can we refashion the religious arrogance that leads people to equate their faith in God with the singular belief that they know God's truth better than anyone else, and that their mission then is to capture the market for people's souls? Nearly everyone in the United States has the opportunity to
exercise leadership in this adaptive context, yet there will be personal dangers in raising the more difficult questions, some of which, like religious triumphalism, go to the root of religious loyalty and dogma.

**Going Beyond Your Authority**

People rarely elect or hire anyone to disturb their jobs or their lives. People expect politicians and managers to use their authority to provide them with the right answers, not to confront them with disturbing questions and difficult choices. That’s why the initial challenge, and risk, of exercising leadership is to go beyond your authority—to put your credibility and position on the line in order to get people to tackle the problems at hand. Without the willingness to challenge people’s expectations of you, there is no way you can escape being dominated by the social system and its inherent limits.

Generally, people will not authorize someone to make them face what they do not want to face. Instead, people hire someone to provide protection and ensure stability, someone with solutions that require a minimum of disruption. But adaptive work creates risk, conflict, and instability because addressing the issues underlying adaptive problems may involve upending deep and entrenched norms. Thus, leadership requires disturbing people—but at a rate they can absorb.

Typically, a company faces adaptive pressures when new market conditions threaten the company’s business. For example, in the last decade of the twentieth century, innovators in IBM attempted to get the company to wake up to the real threats from small computers running what soon came to be called the “Internet.” And the innovators in IBM repeatedly found themselves in Löis’s position when she tried to get her community to face up to alcoholism. Their efforts illustrate the perseverance required of leadership until a successful adaptation can take hold.

As an established corporate giant, IBM in 1994 was a master of technical problem solving. The corporation embodied technical proficiency and served as the official technology sponsor of the 1994 Winter Olympics. IBM kept track of the many winter sports competitors, competition areas, timings, and standings that were scattered over a wide expanse in Norway.

IBM understandably wanted to protect its position in the technical areas in which IBM managers excelled. When the sports standings were reported on television, viewers saw the IBM logo on their screens. This was smart problem solving within the business areas that IBM managers understood well: sports, television, and marketing. Corporate buyers of IBM mainframe systems who watched the Olympics on television probably appreciated the appearance of the IBM logo.

But the markets were changing and business was migrating to the Internet. The companies that did not adapt fast enough would fail. Some dark clouds were hovering over IBM’s technological successes in the Olympics. The corporation had suffered $15 billion in losses over the past three years, reflecting problems in many of their product lines. The financial setbacks made people at IBM vulnerable and even more risk averse than usual. Moreover, they were culturally and emotionally unprepared to make the big leap to the Internet world. The underlying value structure of the organization as a whole was characterized by a smug parochialism coupled with a resistance to early entry into new markets. Nothing less than the IBM culture and underlying corporate values had to change in order to succeed in the Internet environment.

Watching the Olympics at home near his office at Cornell University’s Theory Center, a young IBM Corporation engineer named David Grossman discovered that an enterprising Web site had intercepted the IBM feed to the television networks, diverted the information to the Internet, and was displaying IBM’s tabulations under the Sun Microsystems, Inc., logo. Grossman was shocked. “And IBM didn’t have a clue . . .” he recalled.
As he soon discovered, the problem, like many tough problems, contained both technical and adaptive elements. After his effort to get managers to understand the technical parts of the problem, IBM attorneys sent Sun Microsystems a letter demanding that Sun stop displaying the IBM data on the Sun site. That effort to protect IBM’s work product was resolved with IBM’s existing legal and technical expertise.

At the same time, as Grossman pushed IBM managers to deal with the business that the Internet would continue to grab from IBM, he uncovered values and lifetime habits that were unrealistic and dysfunctional in the Internet age. These beliefs about how the business world worked kept IBM from dealing with the reality of the new market challenge. The Internet provided an entirely new channel for marketing products and a vehicle for a raft of potential new products and services, such as consulting services to existing clients on Internet applications and new Internet-friendly software. The speed of change was faster than any of the senior managers had ever witnessed in their long careers. It was as if IBM were depending on continued strong sales of first-rate buggy whips while the automobile was right around the corner. The company was so behind the curve that Grossman could not even find a way to use IBM’s primitive e-mail system to send the IBM marketing staff in Norway the screen shots from Sun’s Web site as he watched the piracy during the Winter Games.

Luckily, some IBM managers grasped enough of the reality of the problem to come to Grossman’s aid when he made his arguments. In particular, John Patrick, who had managed the marketing of the IBM ThinkPad laptop, proceeded to secure for Grossman and other innovators the attention they would need to shift the outdated values and habits in the IBM corporate culture.

Grossman and Patrick led a struggle inside the company that lasted for five years. Just prior to the new millennium, IBM managers emerged as a team with revamped values, more flexible beliefs, and new behavior patterns designed to make IBM a proactive force in an Internet world.

The change was profound and deep. IBM had a reputation for being a bureaucratic dinosaur. But by 1999, Lou Gerstner, CEO of IBM, could trumpet hard figures on the five-year IBM restructuring to Wall Street investors. Gerstner could show that IBM was a highly profitable Internet company, with internal operations, business processes, and customer responses that compared favorably with even the most innovative of Internet corporations. Approximately one-quarter of its $82 billion in revenues was now Net related. The demonstration of the culture change in IBM was so convincing that IBM’s stock shot up twenty points.

Rather than frame the Internet as a technical challenge for IBM’s experts, Grossman and Patrick presented it as a cultural and values problem that IBM had neglected when it broke into smaller, more manageable departments. CEO Gerstner described the work this way: “We discovered what every large company has. When you bring your company to the Web, you expose all the inefficiency that comes from decentralized organizations.”

As middle managers, Grossman and Patrick had the authority to direct only those few who reported to them. And even then, they could not order their employees to act against company policy. They each also reported to a boss. Both Grossman and Patrick went beyond their authority when progress required it. Patrick said, “If you don’t occasionally exceed your formal authority, you are not pushing the envelope.”

As a lowly engineer, Grossman went around the chain of command, taking the risk of being obnoxious and putting himself on the line in danger of ridicule. Once, he barged into the Armonk, NY, IBM corporate headquarters, alone but for a UNIX computer under his arm, to introduce the senior executive in marketing, Abby Kohnstamm, to the Internet. In the same vein, Patrick saw at an early Internet trade show how much difference it made to have the biggest space in the display. So he committed IBM for the biggest display space in the next year’s show, even though it was not his job to make that decision alone. However, if he had waited for the IBM bureaucracy to set aside the money and give him the authorization,
the display space auction would have closed and the opportunity would have been missed.

To act outside the narrow confines of your job description when progress requires it lies close to the heart of leadership, and to its danger. Your initiative in breaking the boundaries of your authorization might pay off for your organization or community. In retrospect, it might even be recognized as crucial for success. Along the way, however, you will face resistance and possibly the pain of disciplinary action or other rebukes from senior authority for breaking the rules. You will be characterized as being out of place, out of turn, or too big for your britches.

The toughest problems that groups and communities face are hard precisely because the group or community will not authorize anyone to push them to address those problems. To the contrary, the rules, organizational culture and norms, standard operating procedures, and economic incentives regularly discourage people from facing the hardest questions and making the most difficult choices.

In the 1990s, when New York City mayor Rudolph Giuliani and his police chief, William Bratton, forcefully went after the crime problem in New York City, they were doing exactly what many in the community wanted them to do, and what they were implicitly authorized to do. They were expected to relentlessly crack down on crime without forcing the community to accept any trade-offs the police might have to make in terms of police brutality and people's civil liberties. Like many communities, most people in New York City wanted the crime problem to be solved without having to compromise other values. Going with the grain of public expectations—their informal authorization—Giuliani and Bratton brought down the crime rate. Giuliani was rewarded when a satisfied public reelected him in 1997 by a landslide.

However, just before his reelection, on the night of April 9, 1997, some police officers brutalized Abner Louima with a toilet plunger. The incident came to light very quickly, and the ensuing controversy began to focus the broader community on some of the difficult trade-offs they had heretofore been reluctant to make. The issue of racial profiling by police had already been percolating as a signal that an erosion of civil liberties was the price to pay for the reduction in crime. Then, a year and a half later, a young, unarmed West African immigrant, Amadou Diallo, was shot forty-one times by four white police officers in a search for a rape suspect that went terribly wrong. Although the four officers in the Diallo incident were acquitted, the incident raised further questions about what had been the social and human costs of the otherwise successful crackdown on crime.

Leadership is not the same as authority. It would have been an exercise of leadership, and not just authority, had Giuliani gone public with the question: "How zealous should the police be, at the expense of individual liberty and increased brutality?" Had the public, and Bratton's police department, been forced to deal with that trade-off, Giuliani would surely have been attacked by the press, the public, and the police department. However, this might have provoked people to take responsibility for their choices as citizens. Moreover, it might have led to creative thinking and new options—solutions that other police departments across America were finding during those very same years, producing dramatic reductions in crime without such high costs. Giuliani and Bratton were not authorized to make their constituencies own the issue and resolve those trade-offs.

Of course, exceeding your authority is not, in and of itself, leadership. You may be courageous and you may have vision, but these qualities may have nothing to do with getting people to grapple with hard realities. For example, Colonel Oliver North went beyond his authority in the Iran-Contra affair. Transferring money from Iran arms sales to buy Contra weapons may or may not have had approval from the White House, but it was certainly beyond the authority he had from the Congress. Yet, rather than get U.S. policymakers to tackle the problems posed by Iran and Nicaragua, he tried to engineer secret fixes behind their backs. He failed to lead because he took Congress and the White House off the hook of having to grapple with the issues and make unpopular choices.
Rosa Parks, an elderly black woman, also went beyond her authority when she refused to move to the back of a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955. What distinguishes her from North, however, and made her behavior an act of leadership, was that she and other civil rights leaders used the incident to focus public attention and responsibility on the issue of civil rights, not to avoid it. Her action provoked an outcry of protest that catalyzed the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Congress, the White House, and the American people were provoked to engage the issues, confront deep-seated loyalties, and make new choices.

At the Heart of Danger Is Loss

Frequently, people who seek to exercise leadership are amazed that their organizations and communities resist. Why should people oppose you when you are helping them change habits, attitudes, and values that only hold them back, when you are doing something good for them?

Ron recalls serving as a medical intern at the King’s County Hospital emergency room in Brooklyn, New York, and working with women who had been battered by their boyfriends or husbands. He would ask in various ways, “Why not leave the guy? Surely life can be better for you.” And in a variety of ways they would respond, “Well, my boyfriend gets this way sometimes when he’s drinking, but when he’s sober he loves me so much. I’ve never known anyone love me more sweetly than he does, except when he’s going crazy. What would I do alone?”

To persuade people to give up the love they know for a love they’ve never experienced means convincing them to take a leap of faith in themselves and in life. They must experience the loss of a relationship that, despite its problems, provides satisfaction and familiarity, and they will suffer the discomfort of sustained uncertainty about what will replace it. In breaking with the past, there will be historical losses to contend with, too, particularly the feelings of disloyalty to the sources of the values that kept the relationship together. For example, acknowledging the damage from abusive parents earlier in life also means experiencing disloyalty to them. It’s hard to sift through and salvage what’s valuable from those primary relationships and leave the chaff behind. Even doing that successfully will be experienced somewhat as a disloyalty to those relationships. Moreover, change challenges a person’s sense of competence. A battered woman experiences some competence in coping with her familiar setting; starting anew means going through a sustained period in which she experiences a loss of that competence as she retools her life.

Habits, values, and attitudes, even dysfunctional ones, are part of one’s identity. To change the way people see and do things is to challenge how they define themselves.

Marty experienced this when he got divorced. He had two young children. He had always told himself that he was deeply committed to their welfare as well as to his own self-actualization. But then he had to choose between the two; he could no longer say truthfully that he was equally committed to both values. His self-identity changed.

People’s definitions of themselves often involve roles and priorities that others might perceive as self-destructive or as barriers to progress. For some young people, to be a woman is to be a teenage mother. To be a cool man is to take drugs or father a child. For some, to honor one’s family is to be a terrorist. For some rich people, to be somebody is to belong to an exclusive club. For some politicians, satisfaction comes from making constituents happy, even if what they need is to be shaken out of their complacency. To give up those conceptions of self may trigger feelings of considerable loss.

Habits are hard to give up because they give stability. They are predictable. In going through the pains of adaptive change, there is no guarantee that the result will be an improvement. Smokers understand this. They know that the odds of getting cancer are uncertain, while they know for sure that an enormous source of relaxation and satisfaction will be lost when the cigarettes are gone.
But perhaps the deepest influence is that habits, values, and attitudes come from somewhere, and to abandon them means to be disloyal to their origin. Indeed, our deeply held loyalties serve as a keystone in the structure of our identities. Loyalty is a double-edged sword. On one hand, it represents loving attachments—to family, team, community, organization, religion—and staying true to these attachments is a great virtue. On the other hand, our loyalties and attachments also represent our bondage and limitations. Intuitively, people play it safe rather than put at risk the love, esteem, and approval of people or institutions they care about. The experience of disloyalty to our deeper attachments is often so painfully unacceptable that we avoid wrestling with them altogether, or do so by acting out. Witness the turmoil of teenagers trying to grow up and decide what to take from home and what to leave behind.

Refashioning loyalties is some of the toughest work in life. Perhaps one of the most difficult challenges facing the U.S. civil rights movement in the 1960s was that progress required lots of decent people to abandon attitudes, habits, and values that had been handed down to them by their loving parents and grandparents. To abandon those values felt like abandoning their family.

People hold on to ideas as a way of holding on to the person who taught them the ideas. An acquaintance of ours, an African-American woman, once talked to us about her persistent difficulty respecting her friends who saw themselves in a subordinate role because they lived in a society where the mainstream cultural values were white and male. She said that her late father had always told her that she was not subordinate to anyone—that she should never, ever think of herself that way. If she did so now, she added, she would desecrate the memory of her beloved parent.

Another friend told us that her mother had always counseled that “you can get more done with sugar than vinegar.” She now believes that for most of her professional life she held on to that attitude—to her detriment, and despite much contrary evidence—out of loyalty to her mom.

Some of our most deeply held values and ideas come from people we love—a relative, a favored teacher, or a mentor. To discard some part of their teaching may feel like we are diminishing the relationship. But if the first of our two friends were to sift through her father’s wisdom, she might discover that he saw and encouraged only two options: sacrifice your self-respect and defer, or never answer to anybody. With further reflection, and if she’s lucky to have some help, she might see a third option: One can maintain one’s pride and self-worth when taking subordinate roles in authority relationships; also, there may be a host of ways to challenge authorities respectfully and pursue objectives effectively from below.

Our former student Sylvia now understands this disloyalty issue very well. She was part of the group of people who put the first public service announcements on television promoting the use of condoms to protect against AIDS and venereal disease. The ads produced a firestorm of protest from people who believed that they promoted free and irresponsible sex, particularly among young people. Sylvia received death threats. But the protesters’ anger also triggered something in her. At the time, she, too, had teenagers. The values of the protesters were the values that had been handed down to her and that she, in turn, espoused to her own children. She was brought up to believe in responsible sex, in the sanctity of sexual relationships, in people honoring each other by their fidelity. And she knew that handing out condoms was in a way a short-term technical fix for a much bigger adaptive problem about relationships between men and women, about sexual mores, and about individual responsibility. As Sylvia pushed ahead with the condom campaign, the protesters forced her to experience her own disloyalty to her old values. Upon seeing the television ads, Sylvia’s mother felt embarrassed and her children were confused. Sylvia had to engage in a series of charged and uncomfortable conversations as she clarified her priorities and reconstructed some of the expectations and deep understandings in her relationships with her mother and children. She had made some decisions about which
values were more important to her, but getting to the other side of feeling disloyal to her loved ones was a painful process as she moved toward a more deliberate integration of herself.

The dangers of exercising leadership derive from the nature of the problems for which leadership is necessary. Adaptive change stimulates resistance because it challenges people's habits, beliefs, and values. It asks them to take a loss, experience uncertainty, and even express disloyalty to people and cultures. Because adaptive change forces people to question and perhaps redefine aspects of their identity, it also challenges their sense of competence. Loss, disloyalty, and feeling incompetent: That's a lot to ask. No wonder people resist.

Since the resistance is designed to get you to back away, the various forms may be hard to recognize. You may not see the trap until it is too late. Recognizing these dangers, then, becomes of paramount importance.

The dangers of leadership take many forms. Although each organization and culture has its preferred ways to restore equilibrium when someone upsets the balance, we've noticed four basic forms with countless ingenious variations. When exercising leadership, you risk getting marginalized, diverted, attacked, or seduced. Regardless of the form, however, the point is the same. When people resist adaptive work, their goal is to shut down those who exercise leadership in order to preserve what they have.

Organizations are clever about this. Each of these forms has its subtleties. What makes them effective is that they are not obvious. So, people trying to exercise leadership are often pushed aside by surprise. For example, betrayal often comes from places and people you don't expect. Some individuals may not even realize that they are being used to betray you. We know from personal experience that when you are caught up in the action, carrying a cause you believe in, it can be difficult to see the patterns. Over and over again, we have heard stories of people exercising leadership who never saw the danger coming until it was too late to respond.
Marginalization

Getting marginalized sometimes takes literal form. In the 1970s, at the old U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW), Marty knew a high-ranking, respected, long-time employee named Seth, who began aggressively questioning a new plan designed to fundamentally change the way that HEW delivered social services. The reform was the brainchild and the most important initiative of Seth’s boss, the HEW secretary. Seth argued sincerely, but provocatively and repeatedly, raising doubts about the value of something close to the heart of the chief. No one wanted to hear his questions.

One day Seth came into work and found his desk moved into a corridor. His senior colleagues had given most of his responsibilities to others. He believed in his initiatives and questions, and his martyrdom initially appealed to him, but not for long. He soon left the agency and his disturbing questions were no longer heard.

Most of the time organizations marginalize people less directly. An African-American man tells of his frustration at being part of a management team but finding his input limited on any issue other than race. A woman, promoted through the civilian side into a senior management role in an organization dominated by military personnel, notices that her colleagues listen to her only when the topic of discussion concerns information technology, her particular field of expertise. Unlike the rest of the senior managers—all men—her views are not taken seriously when she strays beyond her defined field of competence.

Many women have told us that in male-dominated organizations they were encouraged, and even told they were hired, to carry the gender issue for the whole organization. But they learned painfully that “tokenism” is a very tricky role to play effectively, and costs dearly. When a person or a small group of people embodies an issue and carries it prominently within the organization as a token, then the organization as a whole never has to take on the issue. It can feign the virtue of diversity, but avoid the challenge diversity poses to its way of doing business. The women therefore were unable to move the issue into the heart of the organization. Moreover, when they raised a different perspective on whatever task was at hand, people would roll their eyes and say to themselves, “There she goes again.” Singing the gender song so regularly gave the other members of the group an excuse not to listen on any other subject.

A good example can be found in a mid-1990s diversity initiative of the New England Aquarium. The Aquarium opened in 1969, at the leading edge of the revitalization of Boston’s waterfront. An instant hit, it quickly attracted about a million visitors annually, well in excess of the 600,000-person capacity that its planners had designed. But beginning in the mid-1980s, the board of trustees and the senior staff began to be concerned that members of Boston’s minority communities were consistently underrepresented among the institution’s visitors, employees, and volunteers. Various initiatives directed at people of color during the next decade had not made any noticeable difference. In 1992, a cultural diversity committee of the trustees developed a strategy to attract minority youths as volunteers, which served as the hiring pool for new paid employees. Additions to the Aquarium’s mission statement in 1992 reflected a new priority on increased diversity in its staff and visitors.

The most visible effort toward meeting this new priority was the establishment of a summer intern program for minority interns in the Aquarium’s education department. Unlike the regular summer interns, these interns were to be paid. The funds came primarily from outside sources that supported summer jobs for students whose families met federal poverty guidelines.

As is often the case, this problem had both a technical aspect (“How can we get more people of color into the Aquarium?”) and an adaptive aspect (“Which of our values are keeping people of color away from our door, and are we willing to change them?”). The nature, design, and location of this program were strong signals that the trustees wanted to address only the technical piece.

There was little advance planning for the seven high school students who showed up for the new intern program in the summer of
1992. Deemed a modest success, the Aquarium expanded the program to thirty interns the following summer. But the second year did not go as well. The resulting space crunch created tensions with other volunteers, particularly with the other high school and college interns who resented that the minority interns were being paid for doing the same work they were doing for free. The minority interns had been selected by the funding agencies and had not expressed any particular interest in the Aquarium or its work. The staff had issues concerning their behavior, attendance, attitude, and even dress. Although these problems were not unique to the new volunteers, because the group had distinguishing characteristics, they were more visible.

Late in the summer of 1993 the Aquarium hired into the education department Glenn Williams, an African-American, to take lead responsibility for programs involving inner-city youth. Williams was older than the other educators in the department, the only African-American, and, unlike most of his colleagues, without academic training in relevant fields. By the end of 1994, Williams had raised enough outside money to develop two additional programs for inner-city youth to complement the summer jobs program. As Williams’s program expanded, so did the tensions with the rest of the Aquarium staff, in his education department and elsewhere, whose cooperation he needed if the programs were to be integrated into the institution. As long as he kept the program small and did not interfere with anything else, it was okay.

Brick walls could not have done a better job of marginalizing the diversity issue at the Aquarium. The minority interns never fitted in, and the program failed. Although the trustees earnestly wanted to share their vision of a great Aquarium with people of color, they were not particularly interested in changing the Aquarium itself—it’s operations, culture, and ways of doing business—to attract minority visitors. Williams, frustrated, eventually left the Aquarium. From his perch at the lower end of the authority structure, he could not redesign the whole institution’s diversity response. He had tried, but his complaints had not been addressed. The institution from the top down really did not want to face the implications of the deep changes that would have to be undertaken throughout the Aquarium to make it accessible in every way to lower economic constituencies and communities of color. Williams had not seen the problems earlier because he believed in the diversity goal, he trusted the supportive and well-intentioned words of the higher-ups, and he was committed to the kids in the internship and other programs. The programs themselves were fine, but the role they were playing in the overall organization served to marginalize the issue, not resolve it.

We sometimes collide unwittingly with our marginalizers. A thirty-five-year-old well-established synagogue appointed a young rabbi to be its head rabbi. The retiring rabbi had led the congregation for thirty-two of those thirty-five years.

At first, everything seemed just perfect for the young man. His predecessor said all of the right things, both publicly and privately. He promised to let go. He said he supported the many modernizing changes the new rabbi had talked about instituting during his many interviews for the job. But the new rabbi began to notice some unsettling patterns. When he went to a congregant’s house for dinner, his predecessor ate there as well, usually seated next to him. Frequently, people having weddings, bar and bat mitzvahs, and funerals would ask the senior man to share the responsibilities for performing the ceremonies. More important, when he asked his predecessor for advice and counsel on specific changes he wanted to make in the liturgy or ritual, he received a polite but less than enthusiastic response, which was similar to what he heard from senior members of the congregation. So, he would hold off.

He continued to respond to the elder man with great respect, always deferring, agreeing to the joint activities, postponing changes, and generally, from his point of view, demonstrating a willingness to wait until the path forward was clear. He even passed on speaking engagements that came to the synagogue. He continued to attribute the prolonged transition to an understandable sensitivity to the former rabbi’s feelings.
After a while, however, the new rabbi realized that he had unwittingly cooperated with a broad effort to suspend the uncertain future and retain the more familiar and comfortable past represented by the rabbi who had led the congregation for so long. Both the older rabbi and the congregation wanted to avoid as long as possible the hard work of facing the change and the challenges that would inevitably follow the retirement of the elder and the institution of a new spiritual leader for the synagogue. The younger man colluded with the rest of the community in delaying the pain of transition.

Eventually the young man saw the dynamics and his role in it. But by then the congregation had so undermined his authority and credibility that he saw no way to succeed in the role. People in the faction that had pushed hard for hiring him were disillusioned with his go-slow approach. And those who were most resistant to change were invigorated by their success in holding on to what they had. Despairing, the young rabbi resigned.

Marginalization often comes in more seductive forms. For example, it may come in the guise of telling you that you are special, *sui generis*, that you alone represent some important and highly valued idea, with the effect of keeping both you and the idea in a little box. First, the role of “special person” keeps you from playing a meaningful part on other issues. You are kept from being a generalist. Second, after a while you are devalued even on your own issue, because it’s all people hear you talking about. Third, as with other forms of marginalization like tokenism, the organization can sing its own praises for welcoming unusual people without investigating the relevance and implications of their work to the central mission of the enterprise. If only you can do what you do, then the organization doesn’t have to develop and institutionalize your innovation.

In several of these examples, the people exercising leadership and getting marginalized did not hold senior positions of authority in their organizations. Marginalization, however, can happen to anybody, including those on top. Authority figures can be sidelined particularly when they allow themselves to become so identified with an issue that they become the issue.

President Lyndon Johnson took the Vietnam War personally. Understandably, he did not want to be the first U.S. president to preside over a defeat. He also did not want his secretary of defense, Robert McNamara, to be the heat for the war, and by 1966, anti-war activists were calling it “McNamara’s War.” So Johnson took the heat himself, and soon the war protesters began to chant, “Hey, ho, LBJ must go.” That was probably the most polite of the slogans they yelled at him. Naively, the protesters substituted defeating Johnson for a much harder problem, namely, getting Congress and the public to choose between extracting the country from Vietnam and accepting defeat, or making the huge financial and human sacrifice that might have enabled the country to win the war. Initially, Johnson did not see the danger of taking on himself so much responsibility for escalating the war and letting Congress and the public off the hook for these tough choices. Indeed, he began to take the war as personally as the activists who targeted him. Eventually, however, he realized that the personalization of the war both impeded debate about the conflict and made him ineffective in advancing his extraordinary domestic agenda. By joining the orchestra, he had given up his baton. To his credit, he decided to step down from the presidency rather than seek reelection in 1968.

Personalization tends toward marginalization. Embodying an issue may be a necessary though risky strategy, particularly for people leading without authority: However, for people in senior authority positions, embodying the issue can be even more perilous. Authorities commonly have to represent a variety of constituents. They rarely can afford to embody one issue. They need to keep their hands free so they can orchestrate conflicts, rather than become the object of conflict. And, as we will discuss later, embodying an issue in your authority role ties your survival, not just your success, to that of the issue. That’s a dangerous platform on which to stand.
Diversion

Another time-honored way to push people aside is to divert them.

There are many ways in which communities and organizations will consciously or subconsciously try to make you lose focus. They do this sometimes by broadening your agenda, sometimes by overwhelming it, but always with a seemingly logical reason for disrupting your game plan.

Opponents of the Vietnam War enticed Martin Luther King, Jr., into expanding his agenda from civil rights to the war. Of course, they had a rationale for his doing so. Widening his agenda appealed not only to King's moral convictions, but also perhaps to his own self-importance and prowess, fueled legitimately by the enormous progress made on civil rights. But as hard as the civil rights struggle had been in the South, some of the hardest issues—namely, ending racial intolerance in the North—were yet to be addressed. Diverting King's attention to the Vietnam War had the dual effect of generating even greater solidarity with northern liberals who felt moral antiwar outrage, without challenging them personally. He might have strained those relationships had he brought the civil rights movement to their communities, schools, law firms, and corporations. Their lives would have been disrupted, their values questioned, and their behaviors and practices scrutinized. They would have been on television either defending their way of life or denouncing it in front of their friends and neighbors.

King turned his attention to opposing the Vietnam War with terrible results. His core constituents, Southern black people, were not with him. They knew that too much work still lay ahead in the South as well as in the North. Not only did King achieve little success on the Vietnam War issue, but by losing his focus, he became less available to lead the movement beyond establishing the foundations of equality, like voting rights. Facing complex issues in northern cities and ghettos, the movement bogged down.

Some people are promoted or given new, glamorous responsibilities as a way of sidetracking their agenda. Whenever you get an unexpected promotion, or when some fun or important tasks are added to your current role, pause and ask yourself: Do I represent some disquieting issue from which the organization is moving to divert me, and itself, from addressing? We know a cantankerous newspaper columnist who found herself promoted to an editor's position as much to silence her provocative writing as to make use of her editing skills. We also know a primary school principal in the poorest community in her Missouri school district whose extraordinary success with students and parents generated sufficient disturbance among some teachers (whom she rode pretty hard) that the school superintendent promoted her to district headquarters to serve as a consultant. He even touted his ingenuity in finding a way to get her out of the primary school she had spent twenty years working to transform, with the goal of restoring "order and calm" to his school system. Corporate management will sometimes calm the waters by promoting union ringleaders into exempt positions, in the hope that the next generation of union leadership will be more cooperative.

People in top authority positions can easily be diverted by getting lost in other people's demands and programmatic details. Our friend Elizabeth was about to achieve a long-time ambition to become head of the state human services agency with a multi-billion-dollar budget, thousands of employees, and the well-being of hundreds of thousands of people under her charge. She yearned for the job because, having watched the agency for years, she had a long list of initiatives and reforms that she thought would make a difference. She understood that she was going to upset some people wedded to the current system, but with courage and strength, she felt confident that she could see change through. She did not, however, take stock of two important dynamics.

First, she knew her various constituencies both inside and outside the agency disagreed deeply among themselves on the size, scope, and delivery systems for various health and welfare programs. But she did not realize that they agreed on one thing,
namely, that Elizabeth should focus on their collective set of issues, whatever they were, rather than on her own or anyone else’s. And second, she didn’t understand that they could squash her agenda more easily by overwhelming her with demands and details than by fighting her head-on.

As she was about to take the job, Marty suggested that they have lunch in six months to see how she was progressing on the list of things she wanted to accomplish. Then she charged off into the fray. The lunch date came. Elizabeth looked frustrated.

“What happened?” Marty asked. “It’s the most amazing thing,” she replied. “I’ve never been so busy. My appointment calendar is full, and each meeting is important. Many are contentious. I am working more hours than I ever did before. I’m exhausted at the end of every day. I take work home on the weekend. But I have barely begun to work on my agenda. I finally realized that since I’ve been in the job, I’ve only seen a hundred or so people. It’s as if they all got together, whatever their differences, and agreed to keep me so busy with their lists, that I would never get to anything on my list!”

Known as a workaholic, Elizabeth is extremely conscientious. She takes pride in answering her phone calls and staying in touch with her constituents, even those who disagree with her. She enjoys intense policy debates. The folks in the human services world knew that.

She was right. They had gotten together, albeit not in a literal sense. Warren Bennis calls it the Unconscious Conspiracy to take you off your game plan. Diversion by inbox-stuffing kept Elizabeth’s eyes off the ball. It kept her immersed in the perspectives, problems, and infighting that had bedeviled others for years. The technique worked; it was much more effective than if folks had tried to battle her directly on her own issues.

**Attack**

Attacking you personally is another tried-and-true method of neutralizing your message. Whatever the form of the attack, if the attackers can turn the subject of the conversation from the issue you are advancing to your character or style, or even to the attack itself, it will have succeeded in submerging the issue. Attention, the currency of leadership, gets wasted. If you can’t draw people’s attention to the issues that matter, then how can you lead them in the right direction or mobilize any progress?

You have probably been attacked in one form or another. Perhaps you’ve been criticized for your style of communication: too abrasive or too gentle, too aggressive or too quiet, too conflictive or too conciliatory, too cold or too warm. In any case, we doubt that anyone ever criticizes your character or your style when you’re giving them good news or passing out big checks. For the most part, people criticize you when they don’t like the message. But rather than focus on the content of your message, taking issue with its merits, they frequently find it more effective to discredit you. Of course, you may be giving them opportunities to do so; surely every one of us can continue to improve our style and our self-discipline. The point is not that you are blameless, but that the blame is largely misplaced in order to draw attention away from the message itself.

The most obvious form of a diverting attack is physical. You might remember the protests at the World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in Seattle, Washington, in the fall of 1999. The protesters were interested in raising issues about WTO policies and their impacts on poor people, on jobs in the United States, and on the environment. The local law enforcement officials were interested in protecting the security of the delegates and their meeting. The WTO delegates were interested in keeping the debate focused on their concerns and not on the protesters’ agenda. Whether intentional or not, the physical contact between the police and the protesters had the effect of making the fight, not the issues, the focus of public attention. The squabbles between protesters and police took the protesters’ agenda out of the news.

People become easily diverted by physical attack. It’s full of drama. It hurts. Some people are repulsed by it; some are drawn to it in a macabre kind of way. Whatever the reaction, the spectacle of violence is effective in moving people away from any underlying,
deeply troubling issues. For example, an angry outburst that turns physical in a family immediately replaces the primary issues with the issue of the violence itself. The violent person loses legitimacy for his or her perspective and unwittingly colludes with the offended parties in sabotaging the discussion of his or her views.

In the 2000 presidential election, an unplanned personal attack created diversionary news. In an aside to his running mate Dick Cheney, George W. Bush used a vulgarity to describe Adam Clymer, a longtime New York Times political reporter. Bush had not realized that the microphones were on, and he felt embarrassed when his remark was overheard. The press attacked Bush, using the incident to raise issues about his character. No one bothered to analyze whether Bush was on to something, whether Clymer’s articles had been fair and responsible or had been biased in favor of the Democratic nominee. And Bush, by making it personal, unwittingly served up the distraction and diminished his capacity to raise the issue of journalistic bias.

Assassinations, like those of Yitzhak Rabin and Anwar Sadat, are the most extreme examples of a silencing attack as a way of stopping the voices of difficult realities. Both assassinations set back the cause of peace in the Middle East, delaying the day when people would have to experience loss of land and disloyalty to their ancestors, in order to thrive in today’s interdependent world.

Fortunately, your opponents, those people most disturbed by your message, are far more likely to use verbal rather than physical attacks. The attacks may go after your character, your competence, or your family, or may simply distort and misrepresent your views. They will come in whatever form your opponents think will work. Through trial and error, they will find your Achilles’ heel. They will come at you wherever you are most vulnerable.

In politics, people frequently finger-point at character to deflect attention from the issues. For much of Bill Clinton’s eight years in the White House, his ideological opponents came after him not over the issues but on his character. They found an obvious Clinton vulnerability. As you know, he provided them with ammunition. The personal attacks on him succeeded considerably in diverting him from his policy agenda. It’s quite interesting that the conservatives were not threatened by all of his agenda. Quite to the contrary, Clinton threatened them because some of his agenda was theirs. Clinton was stealing their issues, such as welfare reform and the balanced budget, and if he succeeded, his leverage to promote the detested aspects of his agenda would increase substantially.

The function of attacking Clinton on character was no different than the function of attacking Clarence Thomas on character during his hearings for confirmation to the U.S. Supreme Court. Opponents went after him personally because they had great difficulty defeating his nomination on the issues. Thomas did not fit the mold of an easy-to-oppose conservative judicial nominee. He was an African-American with not much of a paper trail documenting his judicial philosophy or political ideology. He was no easy target like G. Harrold Carswell, the intellectually, professionally, and judicially undistinguished southern conservative whom Richard Nixon nominated to the Supreme Court in 1970. He was not even as vulnerable as Robert Bork, Ronald Reagan’s unsuccessful 1987 nominee, who had written extensively and whose published views were anathema to many members of the U.S. Senate. But like Clinton, Thomas had somehow made himself vulnerable to attacks on his character, particularly the sexual harassment charges from Anita Hill and others.

Attacks may take the form of misrepresentation. Early in his tenure, President Bill Clinton nominated Lani Guinier to be assistant attorney general for civil rights. She enjoyed a reputation as a brilliant law school professor, a trusted friend of Bill and Hillary Clinton, and a creative thinker. She believed strongly in government action to ensure individual rights, and she would likely have made the Civil Rights Division a visible and aggressive activist agency. However, a search of her writings found a law review article in which she analyzed the issue of political representation. In fact, her notion of proportional representation was not a new or crazy idea. In political theory, her argument had both respectability and a
long history, similar to arguments about the principles upon which
ing district lines should be drawn. Moreover, the argument that
drew attack represented only one thought in an article full of ideas,
and it appeared in one law review article by a woman who had writ-
ten several. But focusing on it provided an opportunity for her
opponents to label her the "Quota Queen."
The misrepresentation placed Clinton in a tough position. He
could have taken on the difficult task of trying to explain that
the clever, memorable, and politically unacceptable label "Quota
Queen" was a distortion, and then draw the focus back to the real
issue—the difficult challenges she would indeed represent as an
activist on civil rights. Or, he could accede to the misrepresentation
and then either tough it out and defend her, or throw her over-
board. He chose the easiest route and dumped her. His opponents
had good reason to know that's what he would choose because he
had already backed away from other nominees and issues when the
heat became uncomfortable. But by doing so once again, he gave
his opponents more reason to believe that continued misrepresen-
tations and character attacks would indeed serve their purposes.

It is difficult to resist responding to misrepresentation and per-
sonal attack. We don't want to minimize how hard it is to keep your
composure when people say awful things about you. It hurts. It
does damage. Anyone who's been there knows that pain. Exercising
leadership often risks having to bear such scars.

Later, in Part Two of this book, we explore many ways to re-

spond to misrepresentation and attack. But first you have to recog-
nize the effort for what it often is, a way to divert your attention
from an issue that is more troubling to people. Fundamentally, the
dynamic is no different in a family than on the national stage.
When your teenager in an angry outburst calls you names, in your
best moments you know you ought to stop and ask, "What's this
really about?" Perhaps your son can't stand having to depend on
you, once again, to drive him places. Or he might be just testing to
see if you really care for him enough to stick to the curfew you have
imposed. It may be a great deal more productive, though challeng-
ing, to negotiate with him over the issues of responsibility and
dependency than to get into another personal fight. But it is not
easy to do.

When the Manchester, New Hampshire, Union Leader attacked
Senator Edmund Muskie's wife during the 1972 presidential cam-
paign, describing her in negative and demeaning language, he took
it personally and responded accordingly, shedding what appeared
to be a tear in her defense and making the same diagnostic mistake.
His opponents were trying to derail his campaign and undermine
the power of his stands on the issues. They didn't care about his
wife one way or the other. Once Muskie withdrew from the cam-
paign, she became a nonissue. By responding to the misrepresen-
tation personally, Muskie colluded with the attacker in distracting
the public from the real target.

Seduction

Many forms of bringing you down have a seductive dimension. We
use the word seduction, a politically charged word, as a way of nam-
ing the process by which you lose your sense of purpose altogether,
and therefore get taken out of action by an initiative likely to suc-
cede because it has a special appeal to you. In general, people are
seduced when their guard is down, when their defense mechanisms
have been lowered by the nature of the approach.

We are not talking about neurotic needs only. People are di-
verted by initiatives that meet normal, human interests, too. One of
the everyday forms of seduction, for example, is the desire for the
approval of your own faction, your own supporters.

3. An old aphorism attributed to the late Speaker of the House of
Representatives, Tip O'Neill, advises, "Always dance with the one
who brought you." It's about loyalty to your own people. But that
advice, appealing as it is, carries with it a significant risk.

4. When you are trying to create significant change, to move a com-
munity, the people in your own faction in that community will have
to compromise along the way. Often, the toughest part of your job is managing their disappointed expectations. They may well support change, but they also want you to ensure that the change will come with minimal sacrifice on their part. Faicly, or perhaps explicitly, your own people will instruct you to get the job done by having the people from the other factions make the tough trade-offs.

Disappointing your own core supporters, your deepest allies on your issue, creates hardships for you and for them. Yet you make yourself vulnerable when you too strongly give in to the understandable desire to enjoy their continuing approval, rather than disappoint them. Over and over again we have seen people take on difficult issues, only to be pushed by their own faction so far out on a limb that they lose credibility in the larger community.

Several years before the signing of the Good Friday peace agreement in Ireland, Marty facilitated a gathering of representatives from all but the most militant of the political parties and factions in Northern Ireland. Tentativeness and tension filled the room. Many of the participants had never been in the same space with their most hated opponents. Some of the participants would not talk to others. They refused to pose for a group picture.

The began to discuss a conflict resolution case set in a very different time and place. They conversed slowly, with care and caution. They moved on to the question of how the protagonist in the case had managed his own employees and the difficulty of bringing them along. Suddenly, the talk in the room intensified. The Northern Ireland antagonists began to talk with each other without Marty's intervention. They found common ground in the difficulty they were all having managing their own people.

They realized that they faced a shared dilemma. They understood that the way to peace meant giving something up, but each of their factions wanted to be represented by someone who promised not to yield anything. If the representatives tried to educate their own people on the need to bear some loss, they would be challenged by a potential successor who promised to hold the hard line. Beyond this tactical challenge to their authority, they sought and desired the approval and support of their own people as they entered difficult conversations with their opponents. The applause of their own factions gave them courage. It made them feel important and valued, and it gave them confidence that the risks they took were worth it. And yet the need for that applause and the desire to keep it ringing in their ears compromised their capacity to think purposefully about the larger change.

Negotiators describe a related dynamic called "the constituency problem." Every labor negotiator knows it well: the experience of being yanked back into the previous posture by workers who have not gone through the same compromising and learning process that the primary negotiators have endured (often lasting many long nights). Unprepared for giving up on any of their goals, they boo and hiss the "compromiser," brandishing him disloyal to the cause.

Marty experienced this himself in 1992, when he joined the administration of Massachusetts governor William Weld as chief secretary, responsible for personnel and politics. He enjoyed a reputation for being more liberal than most of the senior staff in the governor's office. He felt not the slightest embarrassment. To the contrary, he was comfortable with his beliefs and even assumed that Weld hired him, in part, to broaden the range of viewpoints the governor heard on a regular basis. Most of Marty's friends outside of the government held more liberal views than he did; they were happy to see him get a good job, but skeptical that he took a job in a Republican administration that had been doing a lot of budget slashing in its first year.

The liberal interest groups, such as the advocates for gay rights and women's rights, applauded his appointment. They saw him as their conduit into the conversations in the governor's office. And Marty enjoyed the role and their approval, too much perhaps. The advocates knew, and constantly told him, that they would not know what to do or how to be heard within the governor's office if he were not there.

Marty began to rely on their flattery, to enjoy being indispensable to them, so much so that he never noticed what was gradually
happening. The advocates pushed him to do more and go further, which appeared to him to be the price for their continuing approval. Instead of pushing back on the advocates to depend less on him and broaden their base of support and leverage, Marty opted for the special status he needed to feel significant in his role.

As a result, his voice within the councils of the governor’s office narrowed and his tone sounded more shrill as he pressed the issues harder. His effectiveness seeped away, day by day. He was seduced by his own desire to “do the right thing” and, more important, to have the support of people whose values he shared. But the costs weighed heavy. Confined more and more to being the carrier of unpopular causes, he slowly but inexorably became less successful in moving them along, and increasingly was cut out of the conversation on other issues.

Although the advocates surely did not intend to undermine him, by conditioning their approval on his increasingly strident advocacy of their interests, they forced him to choose between their continuing loyalty and his diminishing success in the wider community.

Seduction, marginalization, diversion, and attack all serve a function. They reduce the disequilibrium that would be generated were people to address the issues that are taken off the table. They serve to maintain the familiar, restore order, and protect people from the pains of adaptive work. It would be wonderful if adaptive work did not involve hard transitions, adjustments, and loss in people’s lives. Because it does, it usually produces resistance. Being aware of the likelihood of receiving opposition in some form is critical to managing it when it arrives. Leadership, then, requires not only reverence for the pains of change and recognition of the manifestations of danger, but also the skill to respond.