

The  
A to Z  
of Leadership  
Success

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A to Z  
of Leadership  
Success

32  
PRACTICAL  
LEADERSHIP  
LESSONS

141  
KILLER TACTICS  
FOR SUCCESS

123  
COMMON MISTAKES  
TO AVOID

SCOTT • GORDON • COLEY



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Published by HFL Press,  
A division of Harbour Future Leaders Pty Limited,  
Level 13, 20 Berry Street,  
North Sydney, NSW 2060 Australia  
[www.hflleadership.com](http://www.hflleadership.com)

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FIRST EDITION

## SHARE THE experience

I WISH SOMEONE HAD TOLD ME...

This book isn't about leadership theory.

It reveals the real world experiences of people like you: team leaders who learned their lessons the hard way – by trial and error.

WISDOM FROM THE FRONT LINE...

Shares the accumulated common sense wisdom of hundreds of achievers for a shortcut to leadership success.

# I is for introduction

## Accumulated, practical wisdom

This book captures the results of a research program where we asked the question: "What do you wish you had known before you became a leader for the first time?".

Every section – all 33 insights – draws on the responses to this question.

When the group of leadership consultants who designed this questionnaire added the question above, it was almost an afterthought. When we looked at the extraordinary insights offered by hundreds of respondents, we knew we had to share them with a wider audience.

Most of the respondents to our survey were – people who haven't been in management roles for long. We think this is why the responses were so raw – our cohort of emerging leaders were still feeling the pain of some of these hard learned lessons.

These are key pieces of practical wisdom that resonate with new leaders.

These are the lessons that make the difference between months of anxiety and anguish, versus a calm and controlled new leader, confidently finding their way, and enjoying the promotion they have worked so hard to achieve.

To make the book easily digestible we've listed each insight alphabetically, from A is for Accountability to Z is for Zero-in. But there's no particular order of importance – so start anywhere you like and flick backwards and forwards to what's useful for you.

It has been written so you can read an insight a night, or the whole lot on a short plane trip.

Most importantly, we'd like this small book to be a starting point – both for us, and for you. We invite you to join the conversation at our forum, use the additional resources on our website and complete the questionnaire yourself – tell us what you wish someone had told you before you became a leader for the first time.

We look forward to your insights and feedback.

**Jennifer Scott, Alistair Gordon, Lyanne Coley**  
HFL, September 2014

**CREDITS:** We would like to thank the many hundreds of leaders that responded to our survey and added their wisdom to make this book such an asset. The team at HFL has all had the privilege of coaching many emerging leaders and their challenges, experiences, attitudes and courage have given the book its strength. Our team at HFL deserves thanks for their help and inspiration. We've been assisted along the way by others who have generously contributed their time including Paul Pemberton, Kate Smith, Eric Lowenstein, and Eric Harris.

# C is for community

## Best things to try, and avoid

The authors have taken the wisdom of real leaders (which you will find under each heading, "I wish someone had told me ...") and added two categories of advice: **Best things to try** and **Best things to avoid**.

Our coaching team has added these ideas because we know they work. We have collectively seen them in action with the thousands of emerging leaders we've consulted to over the last 15 years.

Having said that, every leader is an individual facing different situations. It's up to you to pick and choose from the advice. You know what will work for you and what won't.

## Join the community

Reading about new techniques for leading people effectively is the easy part, trying to make sure you master these skills is the hard part. The ecosystem around this book – the online supporting materials, discussions, feedback forums – are all designed to help readers overcome barriers and make sure these new behaviours stick.

When we work with emerging leaders in our FASTLEAD program – an accelerated leadership development program for offered to individuals and small groups from companies companies across the Asia Pacific – our participants tell us they get three great benefits from the material in this book:

- **Benefit 1** – Participants realise that the challenges they confront are very typical and have been faced by many thousands of emerging leaders before them. They are not alone.
- **Benefit 2** – That small steps lead to big leaps. We advise emerging leaders to reflect on which two or three insights are most valuable to do today and work on implementing the advice associated with them. Once those are mastered, they return looking for the next three insights to work on.
- **Benefit 3** – That they can leverage the community and network that is FASTLEAD. Via forums, individual contact and additional resources, emerging leaders can work and learn with each other, sharing ideas and solutions.

Join the conversation and share your ideas at [www.fastlead.com](http://www.fastlead.com).

# B is for bios



**Jennifer Scott**  
Principal Consultant, HFL

Jennifer knows that it is never too early to get started on your leadership development. She has been a senior line manager and an in-demand consultant and coach for over 25 years. For Jennifer, the core personal disciplines of curiosity in outlook, clarity of focus, confidence and composure in action, candour, and consideration in communication are the hallmarks of successful leaders. Jennifer joined HFL in 2010. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree and post graduate qualifications in psychology, is a registered psychologist and member of the Australian Psychological Society, and is a chartered member of the Australian Human Resource Institute.



**Alistair Gordon**  
Principal Consultant, HFL

From an extensive career leading small and large organisations, Alistair has faced many of the challenges described in this book. Since 2007 he has brought this experience to his role a leadership consultant and coach for HFL. He takes great pleasure in working with emerging leaders because of their openness and willingness to explore new ways of doing things. He has a degree in Politics and Behaviour in Organisations; and is a member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors where he is also an advisor on leadership programs.



**Lyanne Coley**  
Senior Consultant, HFL

Lyanne is passionate about assisting emerging leaders to understand their behaviours, their strengths and their challenges so they can reach their full leadership potential. She finds this work truly rewarding as, faced with pressures from all areas of the organisation, emerging leaders still manage to present as highly committed and motivated to do the best for their team, their company and, ultimately, themselves. Lyanne has degrees in accounting and psychology. She joined HFL in 2007.

# A to Z of leadership

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...IS FOR  
**a**ccountability

I WISH SOMEONE HAD TOLD ME...

No matter how unreasonable the targets, or lack of resources, or lack of support – as the leader of the team, you'll still be held accountable for the results.

WISDOM FROM THE FRONT LINE...

Working in today's environment isn't easy. Leading in it is harder. The news is you've only got two choices. Complain about it. Or do something about it.



# A...IS FOR accountability

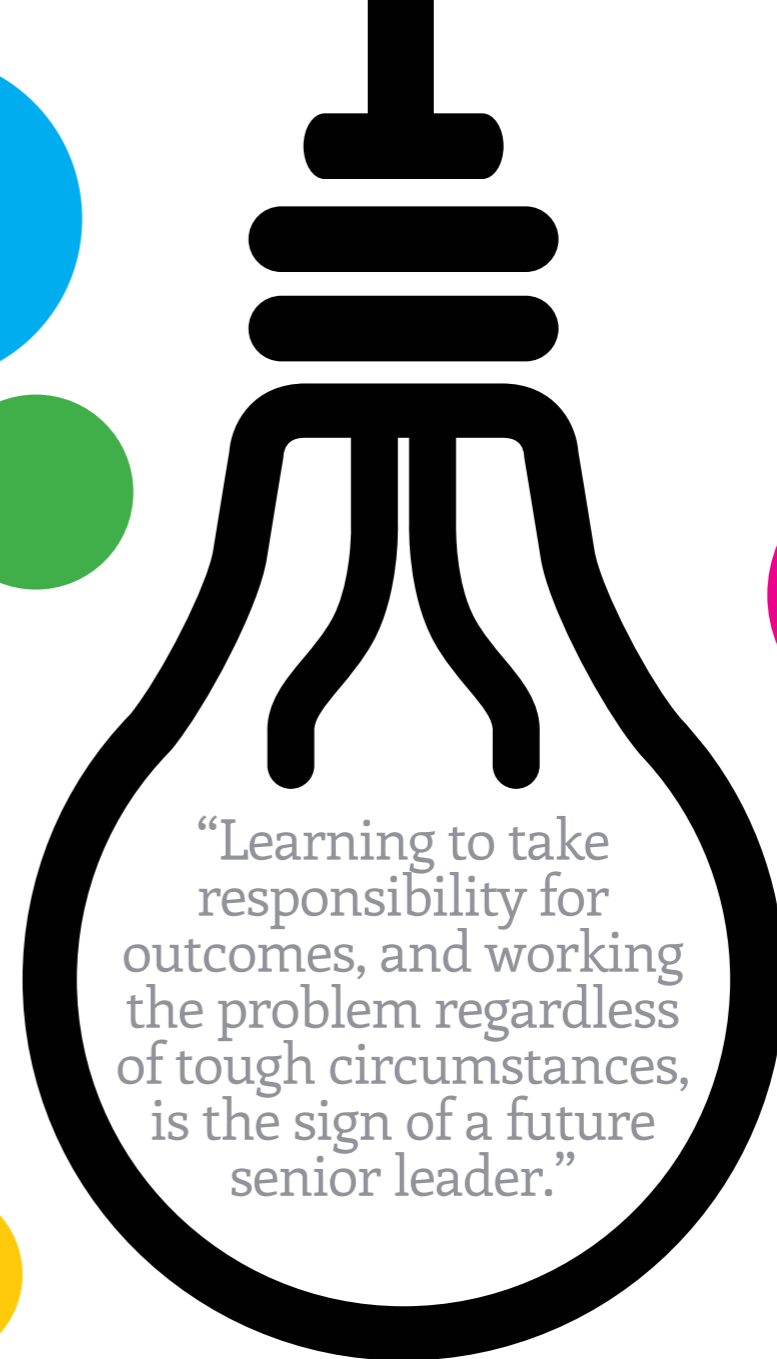
## Best things to try

- **Embrace the challenge.** You will face significant challenges. You will be asked to do more with less *and* to do it more quickly. It's not fair but it is what it is. Embrace the challenge to succeed in these very difficult circumstances. You'll build confidence and a career by doing so.
- **Couch your performance concerns in positive terms.** Rather than say it can't be done, tell your manager that you have been thinking about how it might be done and would like their input.
- **Remember, organisations promote people who produce results.** Or people who, if results don't arrive, have worked harder and smarter to *try* and reach tough targets. They generally don't promote people who complain all the time.
- **Challenge your team to beat the odds.** Leaders inspire followers to extraordinary feats. While you may just be trying to survive, helping your team members imagine what success would look like – being positive and proactive – is critical to being able to push through.

## Best things to avoid

- **Avoid admitting defeat.** As soon as you do, you become part of the problem rather than part of the solution.
- **Don't let the naysayers take over the microphone.** Every team has members who consistently say it can't be done and their views need to be heard and listened to. But there will be many other views and lots of positive ideas. Don't let negativity be the default culture on your team.

NEED MORE  
HELP FROM  
[www.fastlead.com](http://www.fastlead.com)?  
Check out the Fastleader briefing  
on *Setting Stretch Targets* and  
motivating your team  
to achieve them.



“Learning to take responsibility for outcomes, and working the problem regardless of tough circumstances, is the sign of a future senior leader.”



...IS FOR  
**b**alance

I WISH SOMEONE HAD TOLD ME...

Your new role will likely have some of your old role left in it.

WISDOM FROM THE FRONT LINE...

Finding the right balance between leading your team and getting work done is critical to success in your new leadership role.

# B...IS FOR balance

## Best things to try

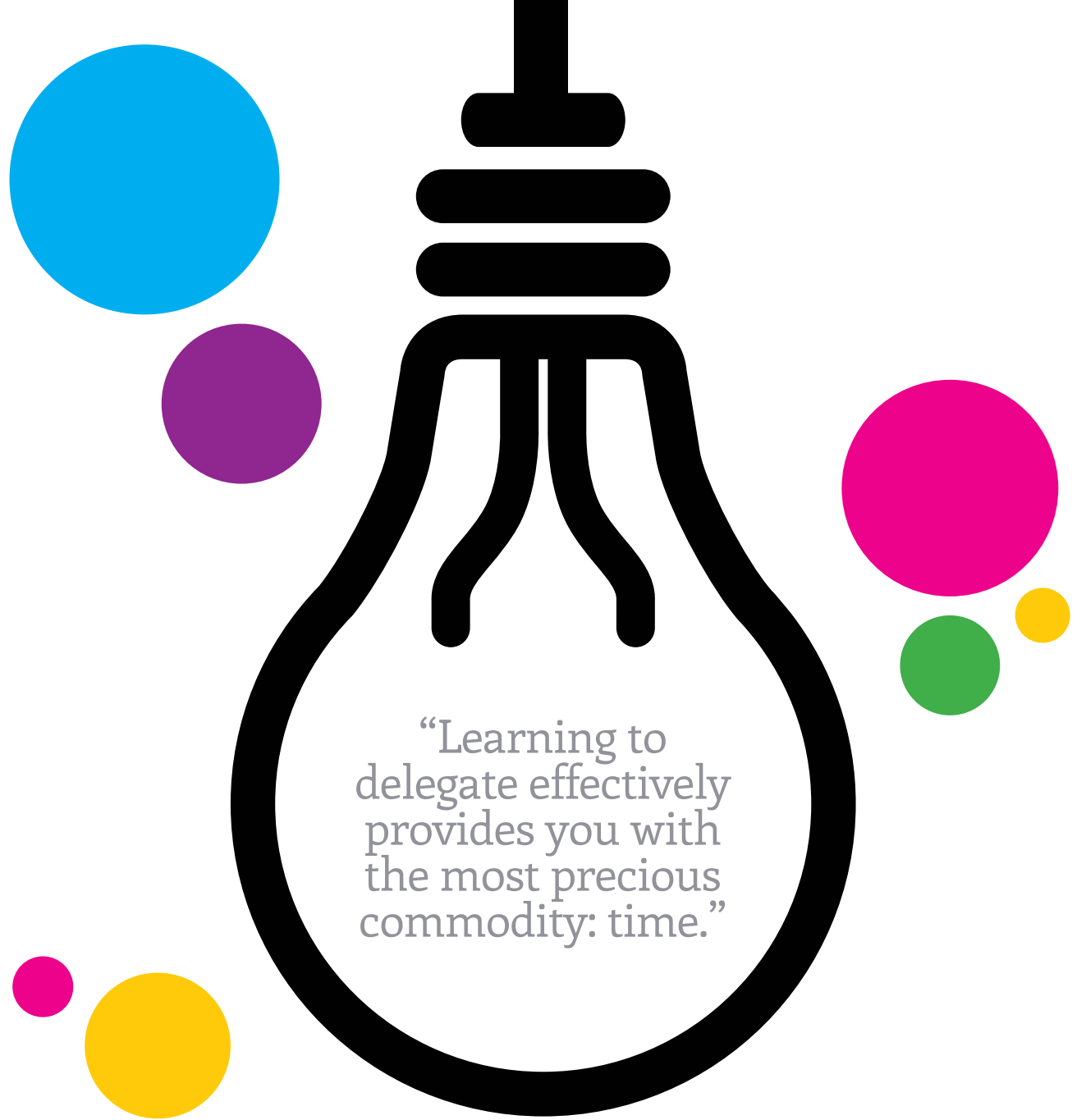
- **Conduct an audit.** Most new leaders try to do their old job and their new job and usually end up not really doing a good job of either. Apply common sense to your new role and undertake a 'Start, Stop, Continue' audit. *Start* means a list of new responsibilities you have as a leader. You'll need to find the time to do these new tasks well. Since you don't have any extra time, you have to decide what your new role requires you to *stop* doing. Delegate responsibilities to your team. Parts of your role you'll need to *continue* to do.
- **Have a plan on how you will make the transition, and stick to it.** A really good outcome is spending 50% of your time on new things, 50% of your time on old things and delegating the 50% of old things you no longer have time to do.
- **Rethink your attitude to achievement.** Before, as an individual contributor, you got praise for what you did. Now, as a team leader, you'll get praise for what your team achieves. Keep your ego in check – achieve through team effort, not just your effort.
- **From Day 1, start planning for succession.** Prepare one or two team members to succeed you as leader - to both cover you when you're on leave and for when you're promoted. Remember, it takes a long time to prepare a successor. Start now.

## Best things to avoid

- **Don't forget to let go.** Avoid hanging on to the parts of your old job that is now the job of your team to execute. Warning: this will be hard – parts of your old job were the things you loved doing and were really good at!
- **Don't give in to 'rescue' behaviour.** These are the moments where team members are struggling to master tasks that used to be yours but you now need them to do well. Coach and mentor team members who are struggling – don't take over and rescue them. This is the mistake we see most new leaders make, because they want to help their team. Long-term, this behaviour hinders the team.
- **Don't give up on delegation the first time a team member lets you down.** Delegate tasks bit by bit, so that you're building the team member's confidence.

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HELP FROM  
[www.fastlead.com?](http://www.fastlead.com?)

Check out the Fastleader briefing on *Situational Leadership* to help you master delegation.



“Learning to delegate effectively provides you with the most precious commodity: time.”

# B

## ...IS FOR **b**oss

I WISH SOMEONE HAD TOLD ME...

Your boss isn't necessarily going to be as helpful or talented as you might at first think or hope. They need training too.

WISDOM FROM THE FRONT LINE...

Build a good relationship and make sure they know where you need help.

## B...IS FOR **boss**

NEED MORE  
HELP FROM  
[www.fastlead.com?](http://www.fastlead.com?)


Check out the Fastleader research briefing called *The Courage Chasm*. The research explores which tactics work best for 'managing up'.

### Best things to try

- **Get on the same page as your boss.** That page is where what you're expected to do, and how your performance will be judged, is written down. This requires a meeting, often requested by you, with some great questions that will: tease out exactly what your boss wants from you; get clarity on the range of authority that comes with your role; and where acting on that authority will be valued and where not.
- **Understand how your boss will be judged.** Ask - diplomatically of course - about their performance indicators, goals and aspirations. And make sure your work is aligned to them. If you help your boss look good then you'll be valuable to them, and listened to more.
- **Find out what keeps your boss awake at night.** Ask yourself, and your boss, what role you can play in resolving problems.
- **Match your boss's communication style.** Ask how they like to deal with the hard stuff - conflict and performance. Agree ahead of time how these issues need to be communicated. Once you've worked out how they work then find a way to fit in with that style.
- **Come with solutions, not only the problem.** If you come bearing bad news, also arrive with some helpful suggestions for the resolution of the problem or your insights your boss may not have.

### Best things to avoid

- **Don't assume your boss has all the answers.** They rarely do. When you first ask what a good performance from you will look like, don't be surprised if they have to think about it.
- **Don't look at everything from only your point of view.** Try to imagine what the situation might look like from your boss's standpoint. Something that you think is urgent might be minor compared with the matters your boss is working on.
- **Don't leave your boss guessing about what can be expected from you.** Be proactive in offering updates. Agree with your boss what sort of reporting regime - how often, how detailed, spreadsheet or written report - they want.
- **Don't confuse politicking and ingratiation with the more constructive steps for 'managing up'.** Most managers want to have professionals on their team, not sycophants.
- **Avoid surprises.** Get all important information out there early, and don't imagine bad news will somehow disappear. It rarely does, and more often simply gets worse.



“Managers need managing too. It's best done with tact and diplomacy.”