

Praise for *Awakened Leadership*

“If, as Alan Shelton asserts, awakening is akin to enlightenment, then every business person (and even those not in the corporate arena) should read this book. *Awakened Leadership* represents a bright new day in an otherwise dark world.”

—**Marshall Goldsmith**, million-selling author of *New York Times* bestsellers
MOJO and *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*

“Many of us are perpetually engaged in the quest to better know the inner world of leadership, seeking to understand how we can rise to meet the aspirations we hold for our teams, organizations, communities, and our planet. Our challenge lies in recognizing ‘what good looks like’ as a seemingly endless river of leadership theory comes our way. Refreshingly, Alan opens wide a doorway and beckons us to walk with him on his personal and very touching leader’s journey. It is on this journey that we experience something we did not quite expect: a new felt sense of our own authentic selves and our potential as leaders. Finally we have a leadership book—a gift, really—that gets to the heart of the matter and sparks within us a growing sense of confidence in tomorrow’s possibilities.”

—**Mark Sobol**, Partner, Global Head of Sustainable Strategy & Transformation,
Environmental Resources Management (ERM)

“Alan Shelton’s *Awakened Leadership* inspires the revelation of our true nature so we can join hands and create what most wants to come forth—great intimacy, vulnerability, humility, and confidence—beyond what we currently know. That is real and true leadership, beyond the conceptual and into the truly experiential. The world is ripe with anticipation of this much-needed message.”

—**Ben Ames**, Senior Project Leader, Program Development, Trane

“Alan, I need to address this endorsement to you. I cannot write *about* you and your book; third person is too far from you. You are the source; you demand and deserve connection and intimacy. And this is the essence of your massive contribution to the literature of leadership and to world culture: Connect with and become intimate with the source of consciousness within your own Being. How bold, how brave, how profound! You have studied this, lived this, taught this, and now you embody this. I bow to you with great love and respect.”

—**Robert Rabbin**, self-awareness teacher, leadership advisor, author of *A Mystic in Corporate America* and *The 5 Principles of Authentic Living*

“Alan Shelton has written a book that is both compass and catalyst for transforming the nature of leadership. These concepts will likely remain out of reach for many. But for those brave enough to take the journey, Alan provides a transformational path to leadership that is essential to human, economic, and environmental sustainability.”

—**Calvin Klein**, CEO, The Nature of Business

“Awakened Leadership is a breath of fresh air in a world of leadership books that prescribe a magic series of steps to greater fulfillment and success. Alan’s story of his journey from successful ‘all-American business leader’ to living an authentic life developing corporate leaders offers us keys to unlock our own unique experience of awakened living.”

—**Erik Mazziotta**, Managing Partner, IMI Conscious Leadership

“This book describes one man’s search for spiritual awakening and how he manages to integrate the search with his roles as a business consultant and business leader. If you, too, are a seeker, and looking for inspiration that awakening is possible while in the midst of being a leader, this book will be a welcome companion.”

—**Barbara Braham**, PhD, MCC, Executive Coach and author of *Finding Your Purpose*

“How refreshing! A book that is an authentic personal story of a ‘hard-core’ business person seeking to resolve his divided self and find a way to be a more effective leader. Alan Shelton has discovered that awakening makes a much more fulfilling, expansive, inclusive, and leveraged leadership available. *Awakened Leadership* makes it easier to meet the leadership challenges before us.”

—**Sarah Cornally**, Strategic Leadership Advisor, Founder, and Managing Director, Cornally Enterprises.

“At the center of great leadership is a courageous heart. Alan Shelton has brought the heart of leadership into his book *Awakened Leadership*, and the world is truly better for it.”

—**Alicia M. Rodriguez**, President, Sophia Associates Inc.

“I was an executive for many years and have held many leadership positions. I’ve tried many approaches to leadership—with both dramatic success and failure. As I reflected on the stories in *Awakened Leadership*, they helped me get clear on experiences from my own past. I’ve always believed that storytelling is the best way to teach, and Alan Shelton is world class at both telling the story and ensuring that the golden core of insight is clear. The whole book resonated strongly with my heart . . . and soul.”

—**Hank Queen**, Consultant, Axelrod Group

“Awakened Leadership is a must-read for everyone, not just corporate leaders. Alan’s wisdom transcends our traditional thoughts on leadership, moving us beyond our professional personas into a full, authentic existence uniting all facets of our lives.”

—**Glenn Odell**, CEO, Spectrum Information Services NW Inc.

“A bright and bold entrant into the tired annals of works on leadership, *Awakened Leadership* is a daring read for seasoned leaders willing to answer a silent call beckoning them to something greater. Enjoy this wonderfully written journey of how to ‘leave the leader’ and discover leadership.”

—**Tim JohnPress**, Senior Consultant, Full Circle Group

“While *Awakened Leadership* is a clear indicator that Alan Shelton has lived a life of leadership viscerally and emotionally, not simply intellectually, he also manages to weave in practical strategies along the way, pointing readers toward their own awakening. This book deeply resonated.”

—**Roma Gaster**, Full Circle Group, Asia Pacific

“Alan writes from the heart, sharing his own journey and inspiring leaders to bring forth their own deep well of life and leadership experience. *Awakened Leadership* is a groundbreaking book, written with courage and authenticity.”

—**Gretchen M. Krampf**, MSOD, PCC, Process Experts LLC

“My time as a seeker has been that of a curious skeptic. I’ve read a fair amount of leadership and self-help writings, especially those that are business-focused, but I’ve never experienced anything like *Awakened Leadership*. I gobbled it up and found myself stretching it out as long as I could, just so I could keep Alan with me.”

—**Michael Gibbons**, VP of Corporate Equipment, The Walsh Group

“Alan Shelton has written a courageous leadership book. He challenges us to experience ourselves without limits. The growing intensity and complexity of the world that leaders face today are proving our normal approaches to design and problem-solving unviable. Alan shows us how to drop the boundaries of our conditioned mind by expanding beyond our cramped, known identities, and realizing our true nature as creative energy itself. When leaders make this shift in how they see themselves, they see the world anew and find innovation everywhere.”

—**Chris Thorsen**, Executive Liberation Consultant, Quantum Edge Leadership Mastery

“Just when you thought you had yourself all figured out, along comes Alan Shelton to tell you that’s not the point. Read *Awakened Leadership* and learn how to go beyond personal development to an awakened state from which your leadership emerges gracefully. This book isn’t just for corporate leaders, it’s for everyone who leads, lives, and loves.”

—**Linda Peterson**, BSN, MEd, ORSCC

Awakened Leadership is a deeply personal book with a deeply personal message for all leaders who wonder how to be most effective in the biggest possible way. Alan weaves his life experience, with all its messy contradictions, into an unexpectedly neat package of realization of the oneness that unites us all. Alan reassures us that we are indeed unique players but are being lived in every moment. What a relief for the business leader to lay aside ego/doer polishing and embrace life just as it is. That's when the extraordinary happens!"

—**Bob Bunshaft**, Managing Partner, Source Consulting

"Alan Shelton shows through his own experience that it is possible—even necessary—to live and work in full alignment with a larger, non-ego-driven stance. That he has done this while serving as CEO of a successful financial services firm lands the work squarely in the leadership arena where it belongs. This is not a 'three steps to instant effectiveness' book. It is a sorely needed direction-setting guide for those of us who are busy in the world doing the best we can and are hungry for solid food."

—**Daniel Holden**, CEO, Daniel Holden & Associates

Awakened Leadership is the best gift that can be given to any leader. As I read the book, I experienced Alan as my own personal coach, sitting alongside me, walking me through this unexpected, wonderful learning experience. This book points us toward a new era of leadership—and a way of leading from within."

—**Dean Hanniball**, Senior Consultant, Full Circle Group

Awakened Leadership is the wild and multisensory account of a seasoned executive's journey into the land of 21st-century leadership. Shelton distills ancient wisdom into universally pragmatic approaches that ultimately invite us to become more available to our inherent greatness."

—**Shannon Schultz**, Principal, Schultz Consulting Group

"The best teachers are those that have walked a mile in our shoes. Alan's experiences shared through *Awakened Leadership* stir up our mind and heart to remind us we're not alone. All of us—leader or not—yearn for a whole life, and Alan reveals to us that it's possible."

—**Gregg Servis**, Founder, G3 Leadership Development

Awakened Leadership

Beyond Self-Mastery

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ALAN E. SHELTON



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This book is dedicated to Odie.

He came to me an orphaned but regal mastiff.
He never needed to read or listen to any concept.
He is love.

Odie graduated this poor seeker from the living
school convened by my grandfather, by Osho
and Ramesh, and the women of spirit in my life.



There is no question of failure, neither in the short run nor in the long. It is like travelling a long and arduous road in an unknown country. Of all the innumerable steps only the last brings you to your destination. Yet you will not consider all previous steps as failures. Each brought you nearer to your goal, even when you had to turn back to bypass an obstacle. In reality each step brings you to your goal, because to be always on the move, learning, discovering, unfolding, is your eternal destiny. Living is life's only purpose . . . The [awakened] self understands that success and failure are relative and related, that they are the very warp and weft of life. Learn from both and go beyond.

—Nisargadatta Maharaj

I Am That

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To My Readers

I have chosen to include both a preface and a foreword, written by two beautiful men who are very close to me, Jerry Skillett and Bob Anderson. These extraordinary men represent the best parts of who I am. They have encouraged me to embrace and hold the two most powerful aspects of myself—plain, hard work and insightful clarity—which have become like two strands of a single rope.

Jerry and I were a one-piece band. We stood together and made up our structures as we went along. And together we learned that it is indeed possible for the human essence that yearns to express its own awakening to arise. Bob Anderson is, to my mind, a thought leader without peer. With his help, I have distilled my experience to develop the pointers that reside in the book you are about to read.

So it would be like salt with no pepper or pepper with no salt were you to read the foreword and not the preface, or vice versa, for the inspiration of these two men, and their contributions to this book, are one.

Notes to the reader often include an explanation of the author's choices regarding the use of gender-appropriate pronouns. What seems important to me, even fundamental, is to communicate how the modern concern with gender attitudes relates to the way I have shared the stories of my life. No doubt you will find in these stories an emphasis on the male side of experience. And, clearly, men and women come from different points of reference due to the nature of their DNA, conditioning, and the like.

So I humbly invite any of you ladies who would like to come along—and, of course, you gents as well—to strap yourself in for the ride. Feel free to throw rocks, spill food on yourself, and use single-syllable words. It's all part of the fun that I invite you all to share with me. I only hope that any divergence in outlook due to gender differences will be seen as an invitation to ride sidecar alongside the male experience, rather than as an attempt to separate men and women. This wish unites us all—wherever we are on the gender spectrum—in the adventures that await us in the deeper realms of experience.

Foreword

Early in my career, I met a Trappist monk for dinner one evening. His name was Reverend Vince Dwyer, and he was noteworthy for two reasons. One, he was at large, rather than living in a monastery. Health problems that required special care had forced him to leave the monastery many years earlier. The second remarkable thing about him was that he was world renowned for his work in human development, which was the reason I wanted to meet him. As we ate our meal, he told me his life story, including the events that had led to his difficult departure from the monastery and what he had done with his life since that time. Not knowing quite what to do, he studied psychology, specifically developmental psychology. In fact, he did some of the early research into the stages of adult development with Laurence Kohlberg, the founder of the field.

At the time I met him, I knew nothing about the study of adult development, so I missed the importance of what he said to me next. Vince had been a sailor before he was a monk, and he still had a sailor's mouth. With a scotch in one hand and a half-smoked cigar in the other, he said, "Bob, through that early research we discovered the same (expletive) thing that we Trappists have known for millennia—that adults can evolve, if they don't stop growing, into higher and higher stages of consciousness . . . all the way to divine union." It took me another twenty years of absorbing leadership content to understand the significance of this statement.

I spent those two decades deeply immersed in all the leadership development literature I could get my hands on, learning from some of

the most influential thought leaders in the field. I discovered a random collection of really great stuff, but it lay within a field that was completely unintegrated. So I set out to integrate into a unified theory of leadership everything I was learning. It did not congeal until I revisited Vince's statement in the context of the adult development research that had been incubating off to the side of the leadership conversation. That research goes back about fifty years and includes, along with Laurence Kohlberg, people such as Carol Gilligan, Susan Cook-Greuter, Bill Torbert, Ken Wilber, Brian Hall, and Robert Kegan, to name a few.

The more I learned from these thought leaders, the more I realized that this body of work was the most inclusive framework I had come across, and that it explains a great deal about how extraordinary leadership develops. Everything I have come to know about leadership can be explained by and integrated into the framework of adult development. Now is the time for this body of work to move to center stage in our understanding about leadership.

The Unified Theory of Leadership finally coalesced around the model of the stages of adult development created by Robert Kegan, currently Harvard University's foremost researcher in the field. *Awakened Leadership* stands on the shoulders of this body of work. At the same time, it cuts new ground in the leadership conversation. Let's be clear: While Alan Shelton roots this book in the rich soil of adult development, he knows enough about the technical/theoretical complexities and nuances of the developmental stages to be dangerous. He has, however, consciously and fiercely lived through these complexities and moved into the higher levels of awareness traditionally reserved for monks (East and West). He has done so, quite remarkably, while successfully building a sizable M&A firm.

Alan is a rare combination of practical financial acumen, entrepreneurial leadership, and spiritually enlightened wisdom. So, while he may not be the person to turn to for the technicalities of adult development, he is opening a brand-new door on the leadership conversation by pointing to the experience of leadership that develops beyond self-mastery.

“Beyond self-mastery” is a radical idea. Alan leads us to what emerges at journey’s end. His story reflects that no amount of self-development can take us into enlightenment—this is the paradox we meet at the end of all our efforts to improve ourselves. The self cannot transcend itself. It can only give up the quest and surrender the striver, the doer, the seeker. More striving, seeking, and doing will not suffice. You can’t get there from here. In fact, engagement in more of the self-development work that has been so helpful in the past is an impediment to the awakening we seek.

Alan describes the effectiveness, capacity, power, presence, and equanimity that emerge as one surrenders the self completely. But this book is not only about the spiritual ordeal of surrender; it delivers a clear sense of the leader who naturally and effortlessly arises when there is no face to lose, nothing to gain, and when effort is desireless—in other words, when there is no self left.

For those of us who have worked our entire career to better ourselves, and for whom that effort has resulted in extraordinary development and accomplishment, perhaps it is time to realize that more of the same is likely to come up empty. Perhaps you intuit that something else is needed. And perhaps you can sense that this “something else” is an awakening beyond (or prior to) self-mastery—where the self simply rests in and as the Inherent Unity that is its source.

Einstein said that the solutions to our current (most vexing) problems cannot be found from within the consciousness that created them. Who knows what would be possible in our troubled world if leadership could emerge awakened to the presumption of a larger Inherent Unity that is the Essential Self, of which (and as which) all seeming diversity is but an exuberant expression. *Awakened Leadership* is a vital branch on the tree of this exuberance.

Bob Anderson
Founder and CEO of The Leadership Circle

Preface

For eight years, I worked side by side with Alan Shelton. It was in this setting that I came to understand the depth, compassion, competitiveness, and spirit of this truly authentic Californian. Alan is so talented that I made up a new word to describe him: “intellectuality.” While not included in Webster’s dictionary (so far), I define it as the ability to be engaged in the shared intellect that permeates the heart. When practiced in the leadership context, it may be the largest paradigm shift in leadership thinking ever experienced.

Alan and I spoke daily, drilling down deeply to solve the most pressing issues of the day for what turned out to be our grossly underfunded, brilliant business experiment, 24–7 digital. Minute by minute, we had to examine our path closely, deliberately, to determine whether our actions were emerging from the heart or from the head. We were seeking the “heart decisions”—the ones influenced not by textbooks, or ego, or judgment, but by whatever God was trying to accomplish through us. We were simply participants in a global, Shakespeare-scale play. We accepted whatever arose from the heart, and that’s what we would say and do.

Frankly, we had no other choice. With seemingly insurmountable obstacles and virtually no resources, the only logical thing to do was to quit. However, through our being intimately present and accepting, the path kept revealing itself in all its wonder. We impacted lives—and an entire industry—and accomplished more than what was realistically

possible. It didn't make any sense, yet this natural movement was all-knowing. What an awesome adventure.

Alan taught me not to think. That doesn't mean doing nothing; it means being available to quiet the endless self-talk so that the body-mind can do instinctively what it is meant to do, without getting in its own way. I suspect that artists have flashes of this; children have flashes of this; making love has flashes of this. But business? Surely not.

Wrong. Nothing could be more important and brilliant for a leader.

In the simple stories in this book, Alan has captured how life is lived *through* you. You will discover that if you choose to observe and fully participate—without judgment—in your own life, then everything unfolds naturally. In a business context, this experience is powerfully enjoyable. If every moment is perfectly orchestrated by God, why not enjoy participating in this mystery?

In sharing his experiences, Alan reveals his heart to you, entertaining and educating you at the same time. By the time you finish this book, you will recognize that Alan Shelton does not fit any leadership stereotypes. He is a choiceless thinker, a passionate man and, most important, a leader from whom there is much to learn. Intellectuality . . .

Jerry Skillett
CEO, Parkblue

Author's Preface

Many books have been written that propose to give a blueprint to humanity for how to be happy. This isn't one of them. I suppose that "happy" is a stand-in for the entire category of things that people seek—joy, peace, love, money, pleasure, fulfillment, and so on. With so many objects of pursuit, it is apparent that we are all looking for something. In fact, the common denominator of humanity seems to be a search so desperate that most people go through life in a state of perpetual bondage to this seeking. Looking everywhere except inside themselves, they cobble together a life that they imagine will be better if they succeed in changing the scenery.

In some cases, this search for satisfaction through external acquisition and achievement becomes so frustrating that an individual finally turns inward and dedicates his or her life to being a spiritual seeker. But the problem is the same for every seeker—and we are all seekers, regardless of our goals and the context of our efforts. We become trapped in a state of dissatisfaction and frustration of our own design, which I call "the seeker's hole." And we become completely convinced that unless we do all the right things, we will be stuck down there forever. We struggle like hell to get out by any means we think will work, never realizing what is responsible for keeping us in there, much less how to get out.

This brings to mind a story that was told during an episode of my then favorite TV show, *The West Wing*. It goes something like this:

A guy walking down the street falls into a hole. The sides are so steep that it seems impossible to get out, but he tries anyway. He keeps at it hour after hour, slipping back down again on each attempt.

After a while, he realizes that he can see who's walking by if he cranes his neck at the correct angle. A doctor passes by, and the guy shouts up, "Hey, you . . . can you help me out?" The doctor writes a prescription, throws it down the hole, and moves on. Not long afterward, a priest comes along, and the guy yells out, "Father, I'm down in this hole; please, can you help me?" The priest scribbles down a prayer, throws it down the hole, and moves on. Then, to the man's elation, one of his friends walks by. "Joe, it's me! Am I ever glad to see you. Give me some help here, okay?"

At this, the friend jumps into the hole, and our guy says, "Are you stupid? Now we are both down here!"

His friend says, "Yeah, but I've been down here before and I know how to get out."

So, what thrusts us into the hole in the first place? Most people believe that somebody else threw them down there, or that their fall resulted from bad decisions on their part, or that they simply weren't skilled enough to avoid the hole even if they saw it up ahead. So these folks spend much of their life trying to compensate for their own carefully assigned causes. They never realize that the real problem is the paltry self-definition that every human being has accepted—"I am an ego-entity." That is to say, a human being who is separate from all other beings and believes himself to be the author of all of his actions. In fact, the sense of our doership is zealously guarded by a "Do Not Touch" sign that obscures the very place we must look in order to realize that this is not who we are. Often, we spend large portions of our lives repainting the sign. This maintenance falls under the heading "self-mastery."

Another way to say this is that no matter the context of our thoughts, aspirations, and actions, we live in a state of misidentification. This misidentification is a bondage regardless of which mountain we have

chosen to climb. It is a function of what the ego assumes itself to be, further fortified by the ego's insistence that its self-definition remain unchallenged. What's more, the sense of security derived from believing that the assumed ego-concept is real propels people in droves to classes, seminars, and workshops to hone and polish this ego that we imagine ourselves to be. This is what I call the drive toward self-mastery.

In saying this, I am not proposing to replace one set of concepts with another; that would merely be redecorating the hole. As it was for our man in the story, only a series of experiential pointers by someone who knows the way out can lead you to an understanding that will disappear the hole. I take it back. That is exactly the wrong way to say it. The reality is that there is no such hole. But you won't know this until those living pointers take root in you. Only then will the shift in ego-definition take you to a new and different felt experience of who you are and, by extension, who and what everything else is.

So what does the life of a hick from the orange groves of Southern California have to do with any of this?

My story begins in the small town of Corona, where I began to suspect that a first glance doesn't reveal the whole picture. Picture a summer day with the temperature hovering around a hundred degrees, and in its place a skinny ten-year-old boy, with freckles that defy his sunburned face, marching down the frontage road of the new freeway in his little hometown. As is usual in this type of weather, he is on his way to the Standard Oil station where a magic metal machine dispenses ice-cold chocolate drinks for five cents. As all inlanders intimately familiar with desert heat can tell you, on such a day you can see the waves of heat rise from the asphalt if you look at exactly the right angle. It's as though another world existed that you can perceive if you tilt your head just so. As the boy looks in wonder at the billows of heat shimmering before his face, the question cannot help but occur to him: How many unseen worlds exist?

If anyone needs to pinpoint the moment when I became a seeker, I guess you could say this was it.

Living in California during the sixties and having a dotting grandfather who told me stories about Socrates were part of my early wonder and curiosity about things unknown. A bite of the seeker's bug early in life eventually led me to travels in Peru, India, and many other parts of the world. My journeys, however, were not only to different locations; they also included a career in the corporate financial world, advanced study in academia, years in the ashrams of India, and the convoluted, never-ending drama of relationships, money, and just plain living.

I have spent much of my time and energy bounding after the elusive goal of awakening, which is also called enlightenment. And for the majority of my adult years, I have simultaneously been engaged in climbing the mountain of business. I could have easily done something else, of course, for ultimately one pursuit is the same as any other. There is not a spiritual world out there someplace that is set apart from the corporate—or any other—world. But for a long time, I didn't know this. I can testify that I fell into the seeker's hole, again and again, in whatever territory I was navigating at a given time. After many years, I have discovered that it doesn't matter whether you are seeking awakening, or authentic leadership, or union with God, or peak performance. In order to lead authentically, perform at the very peak, expand awareness, or enter into union with the whole, the bondage of ego-definition must be dissolved.

What it all comes down to is this: Who you really are bubbles up continuously to form the intuition that initiates the seeking. And the seeking that you undertake can indeed eradicate your identification with who you think you are. Moving toward recognizing this truth is a transformational journey in which the "you" that you believe yourself to be will be lost and something entirely new will take its place. "Reclaimed" might be a better term. Either way, it will be vastly different from what you have known before. The secret is: You already are what you are seeking.

No doubt I have gone well beyond what a little boy was able to surmise, looking at those rising heat waves. The discoveries of a lifetime seeker have birthed what is now my life, and I no longer can contain

what flows out of my understanding. Thus, I have written this book so that the pointers toward the truth of who you are will give you access to a bigger stage. *Awakened Leadership* can be—if you recognize it to be so—the friend that jumps into your hole and leads you out.

But before you undertake to read a book such as this, let me warn you: It doesn't end in the way you think. To use another metaphor, at the last station on your journey is a platform marked "Perfect Peace," but when you arrive, you notice that what you have believed yourself to be seems to have gone somewhere else. In fact, there is no one on the platform.

That ten-year-old boy was right: All you have to do to see this is tilt your head just so.

Alan E. Shelton
Oceanside, California
July 16, 2011

Introduction

Some time back, I was invited to a conference for about two hundred leadership consultants who wanted to learn and share coaching techniques. At one point, I was asked to demonstrate onstage a one-on-one session with a CEO participant who had volunteered to be a guinea pig. After a twenty-minute demonstration, I was overrun by the enthusiastic response of my fellow coaches. It seems that nobody had ever been exposed to the coaching style that they had just witnessed. True to the corporate world's penchant for reading books, absorbing various approaches, and then attempting to fashion conceptual learning into an on-the-ground coaching method, those who were crowding around me were all eager to know what model I had used. Try as I might, I couldn't answer them; I had not yet developed a way to communicate that I was simply a conduit through which experiential insight funneled itself.

This initiated a deep internal search to prepare a response to such inquiries in the future. What I found was that my life itself had developed into an intuitive container for coaching to take place. The method—if you could call it that—used in the demonstration did not come from any book or model, but rather resided effortlessly in what I had become. It finally occurred to me that the best way to solve this dilemma lay hidden in the stories of my own ego development toward self-mastery and my later attempts to dissolve the boundaries of the self that I was so certain existed. The clue that pointed me in the right direction was something that my grandfather had once said to me: “When scientists find the center of the universe, listen for the sonic boom of all those who are

shocked to find that they are not it.” He knew that the demand of the ego to occupy that center blinds us to flashes of awakening that could otherwise be seen and absorbed.

My grandfather’s simple wisdom was often out of reach for corporate types. But these were my brothers in arms; I was one of them. I wanted to find a way to illustrate this ego-truth in real time and, more important, avoid reducing it to yet another leadership concept. If what I had come to understand couldn’t migrate into the experience of those who seemed hungry for this realization, then whatever I told them about it would be useless, despite its veracity.

The relentless seeking I observed in everyone around me, without exception, was evidence that feeling trapped within the boundaries created by the ego is universal. So I began to revisit every stage of my ego development, recalling the stories of my life that intertwined with each one. These tales provided doorways, or pointers, for the executives I coached, other coaches who wanted to expand their own client work, and the spiritual seekers who were attending gatherings in my home. Hearing those stories helped put the tales of their own lives into focus, and soon people were asking where they could find them written down. This book is that place.

Leaders and Seekers Are One and the Same

I have spent most of my life with one foot in the world of business and the other in the domain called spiritual seeking. Like the majority of people who compartmentalize, and then struggle to straddle, two worlds, I watched myself develop within these seemingly separate containers. At a certain point in the arc of my own maturation, it became apparent that all endeavors—whether interior or exterior, individual or relational, spiritual or material—have the same roots and therefore must occupy the same world. My transformational processes and insights ultimately came to nest in the one, single, rooted trunk of experience that had given birth to these seemingly different branches. Spiritual seekers are looking for truth, while corporate types are looking for authenticity.

I have noticed that when it comes to executive leadership, most leaders are looking for a place to be great, whereas spiritual aspirants are seeking a place where they can receive the revelation of ultimate truth. From this vantage point, it became obvious that the separation between achievements in the domain of business and realizations in the spiritual realm is artificial. These pursuits are one and the same.

If it is held that the entirety of the human drama, corporate or otherwise, is simply a stage for the development and expansion of its participants, then it must be true that managing corporate transactions offers the same platform for evolving consciousness as anything else can. Conversely, what has traditionally been considered to be the exclusive domain of the seeker extends beyond the walls of ashrams and the gathering rooms of the great teachers and gurus. Passionate seeking—and total commitment—is not the monopoly of any one group. Corporate experience is as real and authentic as that of the philosopher-king. And the potential for living in what is known as the awakened state is equally present in every domain of life.

It soon became clear that I am far from alone in viewing reality from this perspective. The larger world is developing a hunger for the same kind of realization and expansion that, until recently, was the province of only gurus and sages. And the participants in the corporatization of our global economy have begun to demand nothing less than a platform for their own transformation. While the mainstream press brands anything corporate as the handiwork of the Dark Side, that perception could not be further from the truth. The corporate landscape is teeming with the demand for offerings in personal development and consciously responsible leadership. Where these are made available, you will find today's best executives. These men and women have a keen ear for identifying opportunities to expand through their own personal journey and, at the same time, to develop traits that will facilitate successful outcomes in business. Much as I do, they live with relish every corporate moment. They do not want the lifeblood of their passion marginalized or diluted as though it were of a lesser value.

For corporate leadership to be true leadership, it must result in—and derive from—the felt experience of the leader himself. This requires that the tools and devices for personal clarity track side by side with those of leadership development. A leader with a clear vision of himself extends this capacity to see to all who follow him. So we must trace the route all the way back to the original misidentification with the ego-self that we absorbed when we were very young and which blurs our sight today. The personal journey, inseparable from the leader’s quest, makes awakening the lifework of those who pursue either goal. When we as leaders are in the awakened state, we find ourselves being lived perfectly in the realm where we belong. Only this can be properly called Awakened Leadership.

If you have picked up this book, you are most likely clamoring for a directly perceivable experience of truth that will match your passion. You don’t need another directory of models, maps, and concepts, because you know by now that the map isn’t the territory. So who can launch you into that territory and then help you explore it in your own shoes? You know in your bones that personal growth is available right now, and right where you stand, but what can take you beyond canned transformational processes? If these are your questions, then what you are now facing is a decision about whether you are going to leap into the unknown.

Awakened Leadership has been written for you.

Awakening Belongs to Experience

The difference between this and most other leadership books lies in the recognition that leadership concepts must be birthed from within the truth of experience, not the other way around. Nowhere is this more important than when it comes to what is known as awakening and Awakened Leadership. Simply put, the term “awakening” is a placeholder for the arising of the internal, felt sense that your actions seamlessly reside in who you really are and move in a perfect flow.

The words in this book can convey a conceptual sense of the awakened state, but any intellectual understanding that you may glimpse

is just a stop along the way. Moments of direct insight into your own experience provide some sweet relief from the limitations of meanings derived from cognitive thought, but you are not meant to rest there for long either. The function of understanding and insight is to point you to the next stop, which is beyond either of these: the actual experience of awakening. *Awakening is the experience to which all of these concepts simply point.*

When you have made the move from conceptual understanding all the way to your lived experience of wholeness, it is similar to feeling the sudden warmth on your upturned face when the sun breaks through after a spate of cold, overcast days. That's when the soundtrack of all your thoughts and actions will resonate in perfect pitch with your true self. This moment of awakening can then be expanded to become the ground of all/your experience.

The awakened state is not reached with an instruction manual in hand. I wrote this book because my experience as both a leader and a seeker has demonstrated the value of hearing stories and absorbing concepts that serve as pointers within the territory that must be walked on the journey of awakening. My aim in telling the stories of my life is not to provide you with new and interesting tales to tell your associates and friends. Nor is it possible for my stories to create a specific pathway for your life, either personally or professionally. These tales are intended to shed light on the stages of human expansion and development and the myriad challenges that confront the dedicated seeker along the way. I use them to illustrate ego development and its maturity into awakening. Consider them as opportunities to inhabit your own stories so that the learning you extract from them will advise you on your journey. They will invite you to dig through your life and discover where your own stories have led you thus far, so that you can begin to intuit where they may want to take you next.

Put Your Feet on the Path

To make the material in this book accessible to all types of readers, whatever their particular style of learning, a number of different approaches are used. In addition to my personal stories, teaching anecdotes from Zen and Sufi sources, stories heard on TV shows, and even song lyrics and children's tales, open up various access points. The first twelve chapters highlight my personal stories. Chapters 13 through 16 focus on four specific areas—ego-definition, presence, service, and relationships—illustrating how awakening moments play out in each of these arenas. Chapter 17 describes the coaching process as a device for awakening, and chapter 18, the final chapter, offers pointers that can become doorways to the awakened state. All of these access points lead to the same outcome.

As you read through this book, you will undoubtedly encounter ideas and concepts that are foreign or uncomfortable. Your first response might be confusion, upset, or even anger that I do not make them clearer. My intent is to nudge you from concept into experience. Experience itself is an unknown. We simply can't predict what will happen when we enter into any experience. The ego, which always demands solid ground to stand on, doesn't like the unknown and will push it away with all its strength. But I want you to make friends with it. Let yourself be confused by or frustrated with concepts that are new and foreign. Wait. Allow the experiences they bring into your life and see what happens. The movement into your own awakening experience will always be a foray into the unknown.

The indicators along the pathway will become obvious as you read this book. But where does the journey begin for *you*?

Many years ago, at the age of eighteen, I read a book by Stephen Covey entitled *Spiritual Roots of Human Relations*. I was struck by his metaphoric comparison of human development to the seven days of Creation by divine fiat. Covey insisted that the first step in all personal development is to make a ruthless assessment of where you are on your journey. This is

the place from which you must begin. That is to say, if you are in the second day of your own creation but pretending to be in the fourth, this will only produce insurmountable obstacles to your progress. Starting where you are is direct and real. It will infuse the rest of the process with a sense of traction, informing you that there is no masking or pretense.

And so my invitation to you is to imagine a reality in which you arise as the highest form of awareness, no matter where you are in any given moment or what you are doing. No longer will it be necessary to seek out diagrams and models that are a distant reflection of another's journey. You will be effortlessly reflected into every situation in a way that only you can be. Much like the gurus and sages who look to their own experience and report out to those that surround them, you too can expand into that perfect space and become the invitation to others to join you there. That is the promise of this book and the possibility contained within. *Awakened Leadership* is my heartfelt gift pointing to that outcome.

1

The Red Hatchet

After I had struggled for some time to write something about myself that might convey the experience of awakening that occurred in the life of Alan, my editor prodded me with the following comment. “Alan,” she said, “just throw them in the water.” This was both surprising and interesting, for if you had followed the span of my lifetime, you would know that it has been—if anything—one experience after another of jumping into the water with no thought whatsoever.

Early case in point: I was in second grade in the city of Provo, Utah, and my father was attending college after his stint in the Navy. As he neared graduation, my parents were getting our little family ready to move to California, where Dad was going to take his first job. I was part of a Cub Scout troop at the time and none too happy about the idea of being torn away from it—especially not right then, for reasons that will become clear. The news of our upcoming departure was delivered one evening after I got home from a troop meeting. I hadn’t been sent upstairs to change, so I sat slumped in one of the chairs around the kitchen table and waited for dinner—probably venison with potatoes, my father’s favorite and thus the family standard.

At all of eight years old, I had already developed, like many boys my age, the ability to have clothing hang off my skinny frame as though it were a crumpled flag. It could be said that my Scout uniform looked more like the brave banner of Francis Scott Key, which, although tattered and riddled with holes, was found to be still there. Some of the niceties of life, such as tidy dress habits, were ignored by most of us in the Cub den

in favor of important boy escapades. A world of wonder moved through our Cub Scout souls, and we wasted nary an extra minute doing any one thing, for the next big adventure was always moving in to take the last one's place. In the excitement of purloining apples, splashing our way through a pond in pursuit of bugs skating on the surface, and the like, the way our clothing looked was the least of our concerns.

The timing of my father's announcement couldn't have been worse. At the meeting that evening, I had learned that our troop would be selling boxes of chocolate. I couldn't have cared less about selling chocolate, except for the one fact that turned the moment on its head: It was a contest, and the Cub Scout who sold the most boxes would win a red hatchet. My first memory of my boy world coming to a complete stop is encapsulated in the moment when I heard this. The prospect of winning that red hatchet so caught my imagination that nothing that had happened before, and nothing that would happen after, could compete with it. I'm not sure that at any time in my life, the desire to secure an outcome has been stronger than it was in the prepubescent boy who had to have that hatchet. Treating this contest as merely the next adventure was out of the question; I somehow knew this with no prior experience of formal competition. The race was on, and I needed to stop everything else and deliver.

There was one big problem: The contest deadline was a week after our family was scheduled to leave town.

Now my father and I never had much to share with each other; in fact, we most often lived in mutual suspicion and anger. But his natural talent for coming up with solutions to apparently unsolvable dilemmas won out over his general disinclination to help make things work better for his son. In order to understand the dimensions of the situation, it's important to know that the boxes of chocolate came twelve to a case and that the winner of the last candy-selling contest had sold twelve cases. That's 144 boxes, which is a lot of chocolate. My dad pointed out that if I could outsell everyone else by enough boxes before we left, it was highly unlikely that the result of the contest would be questioned, even a week

before the deadline. I took this to mean that there would be no doubt in anyone's mind that I had won. His solution leaped larger than life into my imagination. There was a way to get that hatchet!

In that moment, everything else that had been of interest to me was ushered off the stage, seemingly by itself. I felt heat bubbling up in my body; it was a call to action, a challenge to make that solution real. From that point on, the forced march to win the prize could arguably have been called a compulsion. But that drive was also a surrender, a surrender to the unquenchable call to win, which would become the M.O. that would anchor me—and haunt me—throughout most of my life.

To add to the drama, we were scheduled to leave in December, and Provo was already in the midst of one of the wettest winters it had seen. This meant having to trudge from door to door through the snow and slush to sell my chocolate. I would come home from school and, with barely a word to my mother, grab a snack and launch off with my boxes. I remember the look of weary exasperation on her face when she finally would find me after driving around in the dark for hours. You see, that red hatchet had no sense of whether I was selling chocolates in the light of day or the dark of night. To this young boy, the setting of the sun had no meaning.

As it turns out, I was able to sell a fair amount of chocolate. In fact, by the time I was done, I had sold 135 cases. Now for those of you without a calculator at hand, that amounts to 1,620 boxes of chocolate. I sold my last box on a Friday afternoon, three weeks after the contest had opened. My pack meeting the following evening would be my last before leaving for California.

The next day dragged on interminably.

When I got to the meeting, I couldn't do much besides fidget and look around. When were they going to say something about my contest? Toward the end of a tortured hour and a half, Dan, our pack leader, finally stood up to give an update.

My pack leader was a man who had taken a liking to me and had encouraged me often, and he knew that I had worked hard selling my

chocolates. Dan gave the usual speech about good sportsmanship as I, alongside my dozen and a half sales buddies, squirmed on one of those metal folding chairs so common in multipurpose rooms. I did my best to look interested, and settled for watching his face. He was trying to look stern, but then I noticed something else in his eyes. I sensed that my moment had come.

Dan shifted his weight, cleared his throat, and spoke out in his clear voice. “The boy who is second in the running in our contest has sold 12 cases so far. And our top seller”—he paused briefly and then turned his head to look directly at me—“has sold . . . 135 cases. Because the difference is so large, and he is leaving tomorrow, we are going to award the red hatchet to Alan.”

Before I had a chance to absorb this, the father of the second-place boy jumped up. “But there’s still a week to go. It’s possible that my boy can catch up with him.”

Every child, boy or girl, knows the sound of that voice—the voice of an adult who speaks from a set of rules rather than the spirit of the moment. It is also the silent sound of a promise dropping from the heart of a small child into the pit of his stomach. In the name of an ideal that has no meaning, this voice deflates the burst of joy that comes naturally to every human being who knows that he has triumphed and deserves to win.

Absurd as his protest was, you can imagine that I was utterly crushed. However, my pack leader said quietly but firmly, “We are going to award the red hatchet to Alan, and if your son catches up with him in the next week, I will personally buy him one as well.”

By that point in my life, I had already heard about the wisdom of King Solomon. I didn’t make the connection at the time, but Dan had proved to be my living Solomon. In front of a group of kids who looked to him to protect them, this wise and caring man had delivered a judgment that honored common sense and the tenacity of a little boy rather than rules that made a claim to fairness but, instead, stole the truth.

The following morning, I was assigned the job of helping my dad pack our car. I had slept all night clutching my hatchet, waking up constantly to assure myself that it still was mine, and now I was reluctant to put it down even for a few minutes. My dad finally convinced me that it wouldn't go anywhere if I let him put it on the dashboard, where it would be visible at all times.

The memory of leaving Provo in our pastel-green 1953 Pontiac with my prize on my lap is one of the happiest of my entire childhood. Of all of the things I have ever owned, that little red hatchet is my favorite, to this day.

You might be asking yourself, "What bearing does this story have on the journey of awakening?" Oh, but you will see that at every significant event in my life, I have jumped in the water or scrambled up the mountain. I suspect I have always felt that there is a red hatchet at the bottom of every lake or on the peak of every mountain I come across. And I didn't approach my spiritual pilgrimage any differently.

And so it was that in this warrior child, the urge arose to conquer everything that life would deliver in front of his little face. As he advanced in years, society would relentlessly deliver layer after layer of shoulds, woulds, and coulds. But the initial surge of total response that was now wired into that child would emerge in the face of any challenge and eventually take him into worlds that his future corporate guardians could not conceive of.

From their perspective, that Cub-Scout-turned-CEO belonged on the mountaintop of Corporate America with his red hatchet. Indeed, he managed to get there quite easily, and had no qualms about swinging around that hatchet above his head. But what they saw was a man who hadn't arrived by way of the rules, and that bothered the hell out of them. In rejecting his explorations, they rejected him, with the taut accusation that he was living a life hopelessly compromised. They refused to believe that the journey of the heart could be woven into the structured life of an achiever bent on meeting the most daunting challenges. So they spoke about him in the same voice as the father in that pack meeting,

agreeing with one another that he was wasting his life in the pursuit of a crazy dream. They shook their heads and walked away, feeling sorry for the *wunderkind* who, they said, had ended up as a misused talent.

It would be in an arena far different from the business world where full-throttled passion as my baseline response to life was recognized by someone who could put it into the proper context for me. It took another man like Solomon—in this case, one who had scaled mountains similar to the ones I knew so well—to bring it all together. Years later, in October 2005, I would find myself in a living room in Mumbai (Bombay), India, in the presence of a man whose wisdom honored not only the achievement of a mountain climbed but also a boundless spirit that only a seeker's heart can hold. His name was Ramesh Balsekar.

I had the custom of going at nine o'clock every morning to Ramesh's satsang, the ancient tradition of seekers gathering in the presence of an awakened sage. I would then return in the afternoon when he was available and we would sit and talk about our favorite man-topics. He was a graduate of the London School of Economics and a former CEO of the Bank of India, so we would often swap business stories, as businessmen do. One warm afternoon, Ramesh stopped in the middle of a conversation and, looking at me with those piercing eyes of his, said, "Alan, do you remember when I said that Albert Einstein was just the right body-mind to transmit the theory of relativity?"

I did remember, because it's one of my favorite examples of how truth would come through him and light up the room. Ramesh used the term "body-mind" rather than "I" or "you" to remind us not to identify with our body or our ego. When Ramesh talked about the body-mind, he would often point out that Albert Einstein was the only vessel that had the circuitry to receive and be lived by manifestation such that the theory of relativity could have been delivered to mankind. Ramesh used this example so that his followers would understand that they are not doers, nor are they the authors of their own lives; they are tools of manifestation for the delivery of whatever Existence makes happen through them. The idea that Einstein was the author of the theory of relativity is

an illusion. Though he was perfectly suited for the job, he was simply a part of the discovery of what is true about energy, mass, and light. That theory was not a product of self-mastery but rather of Source itself.

On this particular day, Ramesh felt to tell me that I, as another specially designed transmitter—as we all are—reminded him in some way of Albert Einstein. And then he said, “Alan, you are the receptacle and deliverer of passion. In fact, when I speak with you, it often surprises me that someone with your capacity for passion could ever be attracted to an understanding that takes the passion out of the hands of the supposed author of his own activity. Usually, folks of your ilk guard their passion like a king’s treasure.”

From that day on, it was our little secret, and a source of humor, that passion arises most often and most closely intertwined with the sense of being identified with the ego-self. This leads to the obvious question: How can a person who is a container of passion follow the road of a living understanding that embodies disidentification from the ego? And to its corollary: How do we live embraced in the bosom of overwhelming passion and, at the same time, understand that passion is not a possession. And that we neither author nor direct the outcome of that energy?

In one sense, these inquiries, and the passion behind them, were no different for the adult Alan than the question that arose in his eight-year-old self of how to win a red hatchet. In their more sophisticated form, however, these sorts of questions will not be encountered until one enters the domain of mature seekers of truth. I raise them here as living pointers to unknown experiences that one may encounter along the way, and as a means to tease out new possibilities in the mind of a reader.

Nobody comes into this world knowing what his path is going to look like. Each child is given—small piece by small piece—only a fragmented picture of how things fit together. Before the play begins, he waits in the wings to be ushered onstage. Once the script starts to roll, he will soon be required—no matter what his natural gifts may be—to encounter his own unbridled energy. Most of the other actors in his life will be all too

happy to channel him into the straitjacket experience of being conditioned. It is here that all egos begin their development, thrown without warning into conflicting influences: On one side are the energies that naturally surge through a little child, and on the other is the requirement that they be delivered according to society's notions of appropriate behavior, in acceptable installments. It was no different for me.

This societal demand forms the basis of the concept that individuals can be developed into masters of their own affairs. But the fact that the mind can think about or conceive of something does not make it possible. As we will discover, self-mastery is one of those concepts that seduce all of us with a promise that can never be fulfilled.

18 Doorways to Awakening

We began our journey many chapters ago with the story of how the ego of a child named Alan came into being and developed over the course of a typical personal history. Then, in our discussions about presence, service, and relationships, we came to see that what we really are is not the ego-created and -defined self but the container, the spaceholder, from which all of our life experience can emerge. Finally, in chapter 17, we sampled some ways in which the personal work that leads to awakening can unfold through devices available to us in the corporate world. However, even after this long journey, you might not yet have developed a sense for the distance between yourself as the witness versus being the author of your own actions. A false sense of doership may still be filling the entire space of your felt experience. If that is the case, Awakened Leadership will, of course, still seem to be out of reach. That is because *nothing that you will ever want is within the grasp of your ego*.

This was the insight that allowed me to begin to create space in my own awareness for the ego to be seen for what it is. Up until my time at the commune in India, my only approach to new experiences was to formulate a goal, come up with a strategy, create a list of things to do, and then execute them point by point. If you recall, when I sat myself across from the Multiversity counselor on my first day at the commune, he asked if I needed time to arrive. In ashram-speak, he was implying that I probably hadn't settled in and wasn't ready to begin a journey into direct experience. I did not yet have a sense of myself that could understand what he was getting at, so in my usual fashion, I immediately came

out with the equivalent of, “Sure, I’ve arrived. I’m sitting here, aren’t I?” After reading twelve chapters of my life story and another four in which the examples and metaphors are more conceptually grounded, you are probably in a much better position than I was to enter into the passage from identification to awakening. This chapter is your invitation into that passage—via a process that is uniquely your own.

This passage contains traffic signals that we refer to as pointers. I call them pointers because they are not rules or rigid directives, nor are they prods to complete assignments targeted toward a prescribed outcome. And they have not been organized into a system of numbered, graded steps for the ego to pounce on and execute as it has in the past. They are accessways from concept to experience. These pointers will, however, give your mind enough of a conceptual framework to satisfy its addiction to definitions and directives and to calm its need for intellectual understanding. Any of these pointers can open the door to this calming and relaxation of the mind. Inside that relaxation is the possibility that something radically new can happen that will take you beyond any conceptual framework.

Because each one of you is different, your experiences will vary. But in the end, the breakthrough is the same for everybody. It can be best described as a felt experience of the absence of the boundaries that we have created through the definitions and beliefs that we once held as true and immutable. This means that your experiences along the way will contain elements of the unknown. Bear in mind that this unknown is as much a part of your composition as your known ego. It is through these early contacts with the unknown that your experience of the ego, which is so binding, can be seen, accepted, and integrated as a part of a larger experience.

This chapter is designed to help you understand the function of pointers and how they relate to Awakened Leadership. So don’t go looking for merit badges or red hatchets. Simply let each pointer settle in. Two sensitivities are needed here: allowing and watching. As I describe a pointer, just notice what comes up for you. You will be surprised by the

new awareness this will bring to your normal style of inquiry. And when it is time to engage in a particular practice, I invite you to approach it with an attitude of letting discovery find you.

Although the suggestions in this chapter are meant to lead you into direct experiences, you are not going to arrive at any particular location. However, these pointers do invite you to *start* someplace—and that place is wherever you are in the moment. Whatever questions you have as you approach the door to your our own personal passageway are the perfect questions for opening it. As you begin your walk, remember that your first pointer might be located at any position on the corridor of awakening; if another pointer seems like a better place to start than the first one discussed below, by all means, go for it. Every pointer is an equal-access opportunity—and its own invitation—to Awakened Leadership.

This may be your first exploration outside of the realm of doership. Welcome to the mystery of your own journey.

Your viewpoint is only a stop along the way

We have already confirmed that all concepts are open to interpretation and, therefore, can never contain all of what is. But how does this understanding become a pointer toward your own availability to a breakthrough? As your ego developed, everyone and everything around you underscored again and again that concepts are either true or false. Through that conditioning, you have taken on the unconscious behavior of staunchly advocating your own position in relation to any concept that catches your interest. Most conversations, and certainly all media interactions, are based on this type of interchange. The moment a topic surfaces, people immediately take sides, marshaling the so-called facts to passionately support their viewpoint. They even believe that raising their voice adds to the power of their position.

It is important to understand here that viewpoints do not exist as independent phenomena; they always arise out of an ego to which they are connected. The ego is the platform that the view is being seen from.

Once you are aware of this, an easy device can be used to make this habit of defending your views more conscious. The next time you find yourself in such a conversation, notice how it feels to be fighting for your side of the argument. We are used to insisting on our point of view because we believe that there is such a thing as absolute truth. This behavior, which is energetically matched by the other side, continues to confirm for you that beliefs and positions are either right or wrong, true or false.

As soon as you find yourself gearing up to take on all comers, see whether you can become aware of the sense that accompanies the belief that you are right. You may only have been vaguely aware of this, but whenever you are in the midst of this type of discussion, a felt experience with specific characteristics is always present. Begin by noticing when you have started fighting to defend a concept, and gently stay in that place. Without forcing yourself to change anything, observe any changes in your physical body. What is happening to your breathing? Have your eyes narrowed their focus? How have the tempo and pitch of your voice changed? What do you notice about your musculature? Is your physical stance different from how it usually is?

Once you have taken note of all these things, your awareness will be sufficiently expanded for you to make a shift and take a different approach. Simply begin to consider that the argument does not need to have a specific outcome. From there you can move into the space of hearing an assertion of truth as one of several possibilities. With practice, you will gradually expand beyond knee-jerk responses when your own beliefs are challenged, and your capacity to see and appreciate multiple viewpoints in the course of any argument or disagreement will grow exponentially. In fact, by adding or subtracting variables, you can immediately change the parameters of the disagreement itself. At a certain point, you will find yourself capable of simply letting the conversation be whatever it is. And you will be able to register the difference between the experience of fighting as an ego versus looking with a wider-lens curiosity at how various people perceive a given situation.

In addition to noticing your tendency to fight for concepts as though they were absolute truths, also observe when you are doing this without forethought. This is called being in reaction. Becoming conscious of your reactivity may not be easy at first because your defensive and offensive responses are often set off before you realize how desperate you are to hold your ground, win the argument, or best the other guy. As you become more capable of identifying reactive behavior, you get better at placing some distance between yourself and your reactions. You become the subject of your own observation—your own social-science experiment, if you will. As you begin to increase your capacity to watch yourself, your availability to engage in a conversation with reactive human beings and remain nonreactive yourself will increase.

 ***Contrary to all appearances, you are not the doer***

Awakening is the shift from doership to holding space. When this occurs, leadership emanates from an entirely different platform. There is no sense of personal doing but rather a sense of allowing. That shift creates a sense of presence that can be felt by those you lead. Then all of your behaviors become creative responses to what is, not an attempt to control yourself, other people, and your world.

As we have seen, the spyglass effect is what occurs when you see yourself and your own concerns to the exclusion of the wider field that is present at any given moment. Here, too, our conditioning is so deep and has been in effect for so long, that this felt sense of ourselves is difficult to escape. We have become convinced that we are the authors of our own decisions, plans, and activities. That is to say, we think that we are not only *a doer*, we are *the prime and exclusive doer*. So we need an approach that will deemphasize the single, all-important object called “me.”

Here is a practice that can take you a long way toward the direct recognition that the ego is just one among many objects that are present and perceivable in the constantly changing field of your experience. Pick a time during the day when you know that you will be with other people for a specific block of time—a meeting at work or perhaps lunch with

colleagues or friends. Remind yourself beforehand to widen your perception throughout that interaction so that you can sense not only yourself but also everything and everyone else that appears with you at that time. This might initially seem difficult to do, but after some practice, you will start to notice the difference between periods when your attention is focused predominantly or exclusively on yourself and those times when you have a more inclusive vision.

Notice the difference between these two states. How do you respond to the people and objects in each one? Practice this with groups and settings of various sizes and observe what tends to loop you back into self-focused participation. Gradually, you will be able to experience more of the world from a wide-perception perspective.

Here is another exercise that can help you to move the lens that is stuck on yourself to the exclusion of everything else; it was Ramesh's favorite. Choose a time after the day's events have come to their natural completion and dedicate half an hour to do the following. Select from everything that has happened that day the most positive event or outcome for which you believe you are responsible. Then begin to examine this event, noting all of the factors that had to be in place in order for it to occur. The more of these you can identify, the better. Then for each of these, begin to list all the things you can think of that were necessary for *them* to occur. At each level, you will most likely need to list dozens of variables over which you had no control. This part of the exercise can take you into an almost infinite regression.

After your half hour is over, ask yourself this question: "Am I still completely convinced that I created the outcome of the event that I selected?" You will be surprised to see how much your felt experience of the event has changed from what it was at the beginning of the exercise.

A variation of this practice is to focus on the outcome that you are most unhappy about or dissatisfied with. Go through the above steps and ask yourself the same questions. Notice that when the event you picked was positive, the ego wanted to lay claim to the outcome, whereas when the event was perceived as negative, you most likely wanted to

disavow any ownership of it. But in both cases, you saw yourself as the prime mover in the situation.

When I played on the offensive line of my high school football team, one of my best friends was selected to be quarterback. Bill was one of the most gifted athletes in our school and also had a vibrant, outgoing personality. An intelligent quarterback understands that a good offensive line is one of the major contributors to his success. This is because the job of that group is to ensure that no one breaks through to tackle the quarterback before he can direct the offense of the team. But it had not occurred to Bill that his line was the reason why he had time to do his job; he thought that his talent alone was the cause of the team's success.

Toward the end of my first season on the team, my fellow linemen began to grumble about this. So they hatched a little plot to help Bill take notice of their existence. During a game that the whole team knew we could easily win, a couple of our linemen deliberately let an opposing all-star defensive lineman through during the first quarter, which resulted in Bill being tackled immediately. This was repeated a few more times. By halftime, Bill realized that this was not happening by accident. When we gathered in the locker room, he could tell from the silly grins on our faces that we, the linemen, were responsible. The jig was up. Bill's sense of humor allowed him to laugh as loudly as we did. This experience bonded Bill and our offensive team for the rest of the season. I would guess that if he had gone home that evening and reviewed the events for which he felt solely responsible, he probably would have arrived at an entirely new point of view about himself as both a quarterback and a member of the team. It would have been impossible, given this experience, to claim sole credit for any triumph.

So, when you do the exercise for this pointer, consider yourself and the people on your team—it could be a work group, your family, a social group, a public service committee, or any other group you are a part of—and see how your perception of yourself shifts. You don't need to get tackled by the largest defensive lineman on your own playing field in order to get the point.

 ***You are enough—let your power come to you***

Regardless of how difficult or complex a given process or challenge may be, developing leaders and seekers always bring an earnestness and single-minded focus to the table that naturally releases their inherent power. In my younger days, I was part of a national love affair with what we called muscle cars. My favorite was the 1967 Pontiac GTO. It had a sleekness and beauty on the outside that was pleasing enough, but when you lifted the hood, there sat a gleaming power plant that was a miracle to behold. Anyone with an appreciation for engineering and machinery could see at a glance that these cars meant business. Their job was to achieve the fastest possible speed in the shortest amount of time. When the engine roared to a start, you could feel in your own body the sheer muscular potential that was about to be unleashed.

I have often thought that leaders who follow their intuitive sense of internal expansion are built like muscle cars. They have one purpose that never leaves their awareness and they always seem ready to launch into the race at the drop of a flag. I am not the first coach or advisor to point toward this quality. But I want you to see it in an entirely different way. When someone suggests that you look for your purpose or passion, in most cases the ego takes the suggestion as its next assignment. In fact, long days and nights are consumed as doers construct their versions of passion and attempt to drop those into their life as newfound discoveries that merely generate more fuel for the ego. I am trying to convey to you a much deeper sense. The simple fact that you are reading material about leadership and awakening tells me that you probably have a muscle car engine lurking under your hood. My suggestion is to not accelerate toward a goal or an outcome that you define, but rather to allow the earnestness that is already in you to fully surface.

The next exercise is an invitation to focus your awareness exclusively on yourself. In this self-examination, first take a look inside and see whether that power engine is there. Once you have established that you are in the muscle car category, note how it feels to be in contact with

your own power. What does it actually feel like in your body? It is this felt experience that can become the platform of your internal expansion. Once you can sense even a small difference between yourself and the power that drives you, that observation becomes the doorway to expansion. You will become conscious of the difference between power that is an extension of your essential self and the power that you, as an ego, attempt to control.

Now notice whether you are automatically inclined to harness that horsepower to a particular objective. Is it possible for you to simply remain with the felt sense of your own power without having to do anything with it? If so, what happens to it? Does it intensify? Diminish? Remain steady? Try allowing it to be there simply as the capacity to see yourself more clearly rather than using it to assess or solve a specific problem you may be facing. Notice how your sense of your own awareness and presence shifts when you do this.

Some years ago, a Russian teenager was scheduled to play in the finals of a tennis tournament against one of the greatest players of all time. The youngster was so far down in the rankings that he was hardly noticed. In the final match, the inconceivable occurred—he beat his opponent. After his victory, he was barraged by reporters pressing him to reveal the strategy behind this amazing feat. To everyone’s surprise, he responded—I’m paraphrasing here—I didn’t use any strategy at all. My opponent was such a champion, I knew that coming up with a particular game plan would be useless. So, I decided that when I stepped out on the court, I would do only one thing: Every time a ball came across the net, I would simply hit it back.

His single-focused purpose was not a coaching prescription that he was trying to fulfill but a realization of a particular quality demanded by the game itself. Through his participating as just another part of the game rather than as an identified competitor, the outcome created itself. This capacity for holding space for the natural unfolding of events exists within every leader and seeker that I have coached or encountered. Rather than create a conceptually structured passion that needs

to be translated into a specific strategy, find what already is there and allow its full expression. This is how you become available to your own breakthrough.

A leader needs no followers

All of the pointers that we are discussing are aimed at moving your felt experience of a single ego/doer to the unified field of doing that arises in every moment. A question that might come to mind is, “How can I be a leader if all I am is one object within a group of assorted objects? Doesn’t that disregard the uniqueness of my contribution?” Not in the least. All objects—including your ego—that arise at any given time, in any situation, retain their natural character and will operate based on their own attributes. By allowing this to be the case, you will naturally expand into the position that we call holding space rather than jockeying for position and influence. The beauty of this expansion is that you get to experience all of the supposed doers in your world being lived into the function that they were designed to fulfill. This expanded felt experience eliminates the sense of a variety of players independently exerting their best efforts as single doers.

Once you have made this shift, you can easily see that to be an awakened leader is to allow leadership to arise in you as who you really are in any moment when leadership is called out. Without any worry, you can rely on the fact that the leadership qualities you have already developed within your body-mind cannot help but to come into play. An awakened leader is simply the character that plays her part as a function of the entire happening.

From this perspective, it can be seen that the human ability to collocate multiple objects within the container called leadership is interesting but irrelevant. The characteristics of Awakened Leadership come into play and will be naturally expressed whether the field consists of only yourself or thousands of other actors that you are leading. It couldn’t happen any other way.

 ***Let life live you***

Recently, my coaching partner, Bob Bunshaft, sent me one of his blog posts to review. I was immediately struck by the title: “I am not the Doer, but I am open to suggestions.” I must confess that I don’t remember much from the text of his blog—the title said it all. In one sentence, Bob had pointed to the doorway that takes one from doership to leadership.

It is easy to see the difference between grabbing a bull by the horns and letting that same bull nibble feed from your hand. That difference is the essence of all pointers. It is also the doorway beyond self-mastery and into Awakened Leadership. We have been told that we must turn the world upside down to find our passion and then treat it as a call to action that our ego must complete. But in the new land of leadership, where old boundaries no longer qualify, we can see that the natural desire of any leader is already there and ready to go. There is no need to search for it. If we will simply notice that we, as leaders, naturally lead within the emergence of any set of events, we will also take note that our desires, along with those of all the other players, can naturally propel everyone in the field toward a result that does not get derailed by self-interest. All of our leadership attributes will arise along with our desires, and we will be the space within which everything that is needed comes to everybody who is present.

This is the difference between leadership as a doing and leadership emerging naturally. When you cross this threshold, you will taste the experience of Awakened Leadership. And you will see that it doesn’t matter whether the crowd is following you or you are the only one in the caravan—leadership is your natural birthright.

That is when the ultimate and timeless question arises: Are you ready to let life live you?

Afterword

One of my favorite authors is Joseph Jaworski, author of *Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership*.¹ Mr. Jaworski has now written a follow-on volume titled *Source: The Inner Path of Knowledge Creation*. I read the following description of this new work in a book catalog.

Institutions of all sorts are facing profound change today, with complexity increasing at a speed and intensity we've never experienced before. Jaworski came to realize that traditional analytical leadership approaches are inadequate for dealing creatively with this complexity. To effectively face these challenges, leaders need to access the Source from which truly profound innovation flows.

Many people, including Jaworski himself, have experienced a connection with this Source, often when called upon to respond in times of crisis—moments of extreme spontaneity and intuitive insight. Actions simply flow through them, seemingly without any sort of conscious intervention. They don't think about what they do; they just *know*. But these experiences are chance occurrences—ordinarily, we don't know how to access the Source, and we even have a blind spot as to its very existence.²

It is clear that the most advanced writings on leadership are now inviting us to tap in to the Source of all vision and inspiration. I gladly join the choir of voices that see this possibility. But additional steps can be taken beyond even the capacity to access Source. We have discovered in our time together that the ego and Source melt into the same field.

That is because they were never really separate—we were only holding it that way. First, we discover that all that happens or arises does so in a space that is actually Source. And then, usually when we least expect it, we discover that we have stepped into Source itself—which is the experience of our awakening. Knowing that this awakening occurs in the natural progression of the combined spiritual and corporate journeys opens us to the ultimate possibility of our own future as awakened beings and awakened leaders.

So let's begin to acknowledge that our life, as we know it, is handing us a gift of possibility. It's time to celebrate the newly arising recognition that we are no longer required to pursue our heartfelt internal goals anywhere else than where we love to be.

My message to you is that your journey is authentic no matter where it takes place. If you're a corporate animal, much like myself, then that is the arena in which your search unwinds. Everything you need to reach home is already within the world you inhabit, for Source is everywhere. And consciousness is all there is.

About the Author

Alan Shelton has lived a seemingly dual life of developing into a quintessential corporate manager while simultaneously engaging in the seeker's quest. Born in California, Alan grew up within the sixties' vision of infinite possibility. In his twenties, he worked tirelessly to master the nuts and bolts of his craft; within five years, he was at the pinnacle of his field.

Beginning at the age of thirty-eight, he spent four years over a ten-year period sitting with sages in India, blending his personal search with his love for the corporate adventure. These two territories had appeared to be incompatible, but in the wake of an event that permanently altered his perception and experience of reality, he realized that these worlds can be united in *Awakened Leadership*.

Observing that the leadership community is in the process of expanding its stewardship by demanding and creating a platform for personal development, he decided to write *Awakened Leadership*, using his life story as a laboratory. He sensed that the story of the development and subsequent relaxation of his ego could become both a pointer and an inspiration for others' awakening.

Central to Alan's world are the challenge and examination of the assumptions upon which people base their lives. Many presuppositions that are collectively held by our culture (corporate or otherwise) are responsible for both the lack of leadership and the discontent evident in society today. Alan has experienced the unwinding of these in his own awakening. Now his work centers on supporting others to deconstruct

assumptions, thus opening the doorway to the possibility of living as the awakened self.

Alan is a living example among those who know that there is no difference between leadership and personal maturity. In fact, he is a product of transcending that long-held separation. It is from this perspective that Alan advises large multinational companies as well as the type of early-stage organizations that launched his highly successful merger/acquisition career. Alan began this career in 1977 at Price Waterhouse, where he was responsible for negotiating and structuring merger and acquisition transactions. Among his clients were IBM, Sunkist, Beckman Instruments, and Toyota Motor Sales. In 1984, as the senior partner of Shelton, Smith & Townsend, CPAs, Alan joined a CEO resource group called The Executive Committee (TEC), now known as Vistage, and remained a member until he sold his firm in 1990. This group included CEOs from Pacific Mutual, Allergan, Landsdale Carr, Vision Streetwear, and Quicksilver.

After a lifetime of managing organizations, Alan migrated to the leadership coaching area, where his talents could ignite those who are attempting to live authentically in the global corporate world. His current leadership assignments include VF Corporation, University of San Diego, and Celgene. In addition to his coaching practice, he holds gatherings for thirsty seekers who have the courage and passion to take a dip in the pool of intense experience.

Alan lives in a refurbished fire station in Oceanside, California, with his wife of seventeen years, Justine. She is a yoga therapist and healer who works with cancer survivors and individuals with chronic illness. His children—Kristin, twenty-eight, and Michael, twenty-six—graduated with business degrees from the University of Southern California and the University of Arizona, respectively, and are both avid entrepreneurs. Alan has had a long love affair with rescued dogs; as you are reading this, it is likely that he is in his office counseling clients, with the family dogs playing at his feet.

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