



Leadership Isn't for Cowards

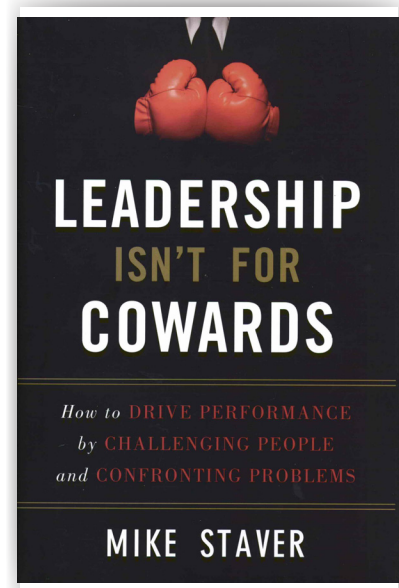
How to Drive Performance by Challenging People and Confronting Problems

Mike Staver

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INTRODUCTION

In *Leadership Isn't for Cowards*, Mike Staver offers straightforward, practical advice for leading courageously, driving performance, and creating a great work environment. He recommends that leaders identify their core values, evaluate the extent to which they are leading in alignment with these values, discover where they are allowing circumstances to define their leadership and limit their influence, and learn to overcome negativity. By also utilizing recognition and acknowledgement, leaders can elicit higher performance from their followers.

YOU ARE MESSING WITH PEOPLE'S LIVES

Courageous leadership involves developing clarity and awareness about the desired impact leaders have on their followers. Leadership impact has two specific elements: scientific and artistic. The scientific side encompasses everything a leader has to do every day

to execute the fundamental processes of the business. The artistic side involves answering personal questions about values, culture, and the experience being created for followers. The best leaders find a balance between the scientific and artistic aspects.

Leaders must have a relentless commitment to achieving results, as well as an unyielding focus on values. The most courageous place to start is by learning to be authentic and accepting responsibility. It takes courage to make decisions with outcomes that affect the success of the organization, or to hold firm to convictions in the face of pressure and opposition. Courage also requires clarity and mindfulness. Given the dramatic increase in the speed of business and the amount of information available today, leaders must identify no more than four specific areas of focus. These areas should be based on feedback from employees, associates, and customers, as well as the company's balance

sheet. It is not the success, but the sustainability of success that makes an organization admirable.

ACCEPT YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES

ATTACK is an acronym Staver uses to describe the most important parts of courageous leadership. The first A in **ATTACK** stands for *Accepting Circumstances*, which means facing a situation exactly as it actually is, recognizing leadership strengths and limitations, and working effectively within the current reality. It also entails understanding the difference between constructive and destructive denial, upholding honesty, facing reality, and maintaining focus.

Courageous leadership begins with rigorous acceptance of the truth and the way that truth impacts the performance of followers. *Destructive denial* is when a person refuses to accept reality, and that refusal has destructive consequences. *Constructive denial* is when a person presses on in a way that inspires achievement against all odds.

Leaders must see what their followers cannot see and push them forward in spite of reality. Courageous leaders also openly accept the presence of obstacles, challenges, and even tragedies, but deny their power and refuse to succumb to them. Courageous leadership is grounded in the belief that accepting current circumstances is not equal to surrendering to them.

Honesty is the best policy when it meets three criteria:

1. Factual accuracy.
2. Usefulness for the listener.
3. Constructive delivery.

Courageous communicators can effectively deliver messages that are constructive, direct, firm, and respectful; helping to improve performance; and promoting further development and advancement. Focus is one of the biggest challenges for leaders; it takes courage for them to be disciplined and to focus on the things that will have the greatest impact.

TAKE ACTION

The first T in **ATTACK** stands for *Take Action*. This refers to the skills of analysis, as well as being ready, being present, and overcoming fear.

The ability to analyze helps leaders solve problems, make decisions, and keep their organizations on

KEY CONCEPTS

In *Leadership Isn't for Cowards*, Mike Staver uses the acronym **ATTACK** to demonstrate the essential components of becoming a courageous leader:

- *Accept the Circumstances*: Face the situation as it actually is by recognizing leadership strengths and limitations, and working effectively within the current reality.
- *Take Action*: Build a balance between being ready and taking risks.
- *Take Responsibility*: Articulate and apply steps to create a culture of followers who take ownership of their responsibility.
- *Acknowledge Progress*: Pay attention to the progress that is being made.
- *Commit to New Habits*: Cultivate leadership behaviors including accountability, communicating powerfully, and coaching.
- *Kindle*: Give new life to leadership, the performance of followers, and the way people feel about their work.



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track. Courageous analysis requires the combination of facts and intuition, and leaders must merge their scientific and artistic sides to perform comprehensive analyses. The corporate world is moving faster than ever before, and waiting until everyone is completely ready will quickly destroy opportunities. One of the most courageous things leaders can do is to shift followers from a waiting mindset to an anticipating, action-based mindset. Driving followers into action and encouraging involvement and initiative is critical to building high performance.

People have a tendency to focus on the past and the future rather than the present moment. This can be the result of worry, anticipation, regret, or hope. Courageous leaders must commit to being both thoughtful and present in the moment. Action is the key to solving problems, achieving goals, and enjoying the most success. When time and energy is wasted on excuse-making and hesitation, both leaders and their teams suffer. Hesitation and resistance to action do far more damage and destroy more opportunities than mistaken actions. Actions drive results.

TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

The second T in ATTACK stands for *Take Responsibility*. Blame is the opposite of responsibility and is an energy-draining, counterproductive way of dealing

with difficult circumstances. Personal responsibility creates opportunity, while blame creates paralysis. Courageous leaders must eliminate excuse-making and stop shifting blame from themselves and their organizations. When a problem arises, the key is not to fixate on who is responsible and why, but rather to own it, present a solution, and move on.

Acknowledging progress is much more than a pizza, a special parking place, or a bonus. It is about being able to articulate how your followers' progress matters to you.

Leaders who demonstrate the ability to be clear and concise will create a model that followers can easily emulate. The best leaders are tough without diminishing anyone's self-esteem or self-respect. They coach their followers to consider the intended and unintended consequences of their choices. It is very important that leaders clearly explain their expectations and reasoning, and work with their followers to create the attitudes and mindsets necessary for success. Attitudes always manifest themselves in choices and those choices drive behavior.

Leaders are often charged with removing obstacles from the paths of their followers. Staver refers to obstacles as "pinch points." A pinch point is anything that slows or stops the flow of productivity. It can be a process, person, policy, or program. Pinch points can be organizational or personal. Courageous leaders free their followers to openly and clearly identify pinch points and suggest plans to relieve them.

ACKNOWLEDGE PROGRESS

The second A in ATTACK stands for *Acknowledge Progress*. Leaders must pay attention to the progress their followers are making, and strike a balance between holding back recognition and over-recognizing.

Courageous leaders must have deep, clearly articulated, and meaningful goals. These goals not only drive professional accomplishments but also deepen personal development and leadership skills. Goals should be concrete, clear, and actionable, and each should result in one of the following:

1. Creating a new behavior.
2. Eliminating an undesirable behavior.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mike Staver is CEO of the Staver Group and provides keynote presentations, executive coaching, consulting, and workshops. His clients have included Leading Real Estate Companies of the World, Cisco Systems Inc., Amplifon USA, Med One Capital, Inc., Union-Banc Investment Services, FOCUS Brands, U.S. Department of Defense, Allstate Financial Services, National Association of REALTORS, Mayo Clinic, and more. His work has appeared in *Bloomberg Businessweek*, the *Washington Post*, Fox News Channel, *USA Today*, and *T+D* magazine.

3. Changing an existing behavior.

It is important that leaders determine the desired result and then work to align everyone's behaviors with that result. There are leaders that do not acknowledge progress at all, and there are others that acknowledge everything, everywhere, even when it is inappropriate. Neither behavior demonstrates courageous leadership.

A lack of acknowledgement can destroy future progress. Appropriate acknowledgement of progress begins with full and complete focus on success in the present moment. It is not qualified or diminished in any way. Delaying all celebration until the goal is completely accomplished can compromise momentum. Recognition and acknowledgement of progress toward a goal can have an immediate impact on momentum. It reinforces peoples' desires to accomplish more so they can receive recognition.

For some leaders, acknowledging progress finds its challenge in the context of the acknowledgement. Group recognition is harder for some leaders, while others struggle with the one-on-one, face-to-face elements of recognition. Both are important forms of acknowledgement and courageous leaders must work to perfect them. Having a sincere and honest tone is the key to making the acknowledgement effective.

While acknowledgment of progress is certainly an important and vital part of driving performance, it is not all there is to it. People will not achieve just because you encourage and motivate them. Somebody must drive performance and refuse to accept anything but success.

When leaders praise and encourage their employees for *everything*, their acknowledgement loses its effectiveness. This can come in the form of gushing, fake recognition, or failure to recognize the right people for the right reasons. Gushers are so "syrupy" that their credibility is called into question. As much as people are demotivated by leaders who under-recognize, there is an equal demotivation factor when leaders recognize so much and with such flair that it is not trustworthy or meaningful.

Recognition is useful because of its quality, not its quantity. If acknowledgement is going to be received

in a way that creates the most motivation, then it must be delivered in a way that lands on target. Praise must be delivered in a credible manner, and those receiving it must sense that the acknowledgement comes from an authentic place. It is impossible to drive a culture of significance and purpose if the people, including the leaders, are not experiencing acknowledgement of their progress. Changing a culture is a monumental task and those at the top must feel that the vision impacts them deeply and personally if they are to maintain the energy necessary to succeed. Three things are necessary for the acknowledgement of progress to drive performance:

1. Honesty
2. Trust
3. Consistency

Leaders must know what kind of acknowledgement to give, as well as when and how to give it. The first step in this process is to make the acknowledgement of progress as close to the actual event as possible. The closer to the event, the more impact it will have. Also, it is helpful to point out as much specific data and information as possible to support the acknowledgement. Whenever possible, the acknowledgement should be done face to face, and it should always be sincere and authentic. Leaders must never use

acknowledgement or recognition as a way to make bad news better or as a way to deliver criticism. Also, they must never use acknowledgement or recognition as compensation for a mistake on the part of management.

Courageous leaders must not be willing to settle for mediocrity; they must make it clear that excellence and achievement are essential. A relentless commitment to achievement at the highest level is a bold and courageous way to ensure that acknowledgement is truly meaningful. It is the responsibility of leadership to lay out expected results in the most effective way possible. Followers deserve clarity and frank, diplomatic communication about expectations. Excellence happens because every person in the organization has absolute clarity about what the expectations are, how they are measured, and the specific part each person

needs to play to achieve them.

There are four reasons why anyone in an organization will fail:

1. Ignorance
2. Refusal
3. Obstacles
4. Capability

If the problem is ignorance, then leaders must quickly and efficiently provide the training their followers need to accomplish the job. Refusal to do the job cannot be tolerated. Obstacles need to be removed. If capability is the problem, jobs must be redesigned, or reassigned to another person. In all cases, excellence should be the mantra. Compromise is not an option, and effort is not enough.

COMMIT TO NEW HABITS

The C in ATTACK stands for *Commit to New Habits*. To have a significant impact on the behavior of followers, leaders must commit to habits of accountability, communicating powerfully, and coaching.

Accountability is different from hovering; it focuses on the big picture by making observations, asking good questions, and encouraging course correction. Leaders must identify desired outcomes and develop a strategy. In return, followers must commit to the results. Accountability, in most cases, is about making sure the intended results are achieved. The most effective way to approach accountability is to be clear about results, have relentless focus on achieving them, and still allow maximum flexibility.

There are three habits that are particularly important when committing to accountability:

1. Solving problems independently.
2. Communicating powerfully.
3. Playing well with others.

Leaders need to commit to all three, and encourage their direct reports to do the same.

The first habit, solving problems independently, requires acceptance of the fact that there will always

be problems. Problems are a necessary part of leadership because they strengthen a team's ability to persevere. A leader's job is not to eliminate problems, but to solve them. All problems and conflicts can be described as situations where something is desired, and something else is blocking the way.

Problems and conflicts are easier to manage if there is a process to follow; however, battles must be chosen carefully. Once a leader decides to act on a problem, his or her first step must be to determine what each party needs or wants from the solution. The problem can then be solved by evaluating possible solutions through two filters: "Is it feasible?" and "Is it practical?" Next, the leader must act on the proposed solution, follow up, and evaluate the outcome.

The second habit, communicating powerfully, has two essential components:

1. Communicating clearly
2. Communicating tactfully

If you are going to lead courageously, you must create a highly accountable culture. Hold your people accountable. Not just sometimes. Not once in a while. All the time. Commit to making it a habit.

Clarity means saying things in a way that eliminates doubt. Clarity pushed to the extreme becomes bluntness, which is why tact must also be used. Effective communication entails making a point without offending others. To balance tact and clarity, leaders must:

- Understand the message in advance of communicating it.
- Know the audience.
- Deliver the message succinctly without harshness.

Leaders who struggle the most do so because they lack skills in independent problem solving, communication, and getting along with others. Leaders that get into the most trouble struggle with playing well with others. They can improve the way they act around others by:

- Being actively interested in others.
- Modeling behaviors that are considerate of other

people and departments.

- Refusing to tolerate the mistreatment of others.

While most companies regularly talk about innovation, differentiation, and gaining a competitive edge, many people fear actively exploring and doing different things because it requires a certain amount of risk. Courageous leaders must be creative, challenge their followers to constantly think differently, and move away from their comfort zone. Doing different things requires understanding the needs of all constituencies, including customers, employees, and the community. If leaders provide solid ground by being tolerant of unconventional answers, occasional disruptions, or creative tangents, their followers will thrive.

The third essential habit is the habit of coaching. Coaching provides a venue for accountability, development of good habits, and brainstorming ways to do different things. To drive performance, leaders must spend one-on-one time with their followers through meaningful, performance-based conversations. Effective leaders must be engaging and compelling coaches. The goal of coaching is to move people from what they currently do to what they are capable of doing.

Leaders who commit to the habit of coaching must understand that they cannot control or change other people. The job of the coach is not to change people, but to illuminate possibilities and suggest things that they have not thought of on their own. Those being coached must be committed to change in order to be successful. One of the most important parts of coaching is establishing context. Those being coached need to understand the process and the purpose.

Coaching is a process of asking questions and helping people explore, grow, and develop, and having a defined coaching process is very important. Leaders can make coaching sessions more effective by:

- Always remaining curious and interested in what those being coached have to say.
- Remaining neutral and nonjudgmental.
- Pointing out the strengths of the people they are coaching, and helping them build on their ideas.
- Being free from bias, but grounded in belief.

KINDLE

The K in ATTACK stands for *Kindle*. Courageous leaders must give new life to their own leadership, their followers' performance, and the way everyone feels about their work. Kindling means creating new life, inspiring or building passion, and starting small and building up.

People tend to hold some energy in reserve because they may need it for something really important. Leaders who can release that energy will move the group to higher levels of achievement. Energy is the most critical part of driving results, and that energy starts with leaders. Failure to kindle followers in ways that are unique and based on their needs will leave valuable energy and intensity on the table.

Noticing others and being self-aware are necessary steps in the process of kindling followers. Effective leaders do not just observe what is happening, but care about the effect it is having on people. Noticing others matters because it makes people feel significant. Courageous leaders remove mental clutter and leave space for self-awareness and noticing things, like how their style is received by their followers and whether or not they are effectively inspiring and breathing life into the organization.

NOW WHAT?

Energy, when invested wisely, can yield significant benefits. By cutting out the excess and focusing on what is needed, leaders can choose which strategies to apply in order to have the maximum impact. Small changes can have a huge impact over time, and persistence is an important trait of the most courageous leaders.



FEATURES OF THE BOOK

Estimated Reading Time: 3.5 hours, 213 Pages

In **Leadership Isn't for Cowards**, Mike Staver presents strategies and methods for solving the problems that limit leadership performance. Using the word ATTACK as an acronym, he develops a clear plan for

leading with courage. Each chapter ends with a set of questions designed to guide self-evaluation and initiate action steps, as well as a QR code and web address to access downloadable worksheets. Leaders at all stages of career development could benefit from Staver's ideas and recommendations. The book is best read cover-to-cover.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

Section 1: You Are Messing With People's Lives

Chapter 1: Do You Know What You Are Doing?

Chapter 2: How Much of an Impact Are You Really Having?

Chapter 3: Are You a Coward?

Chapter 4: Is Culture Overrated?

Attack

Section 2: Accept Your Circumstances

Chapter 5: How Great is Denial?

Chapter 6: What Are You Pretending Not to Know?

Chapter 7: Are You Honest?

Chapter 8: What is Real?

Chapter 9: Where is Your Focus?

Section 3: Take Action

Chapter 10: Are You Good at Analyzing?

Chapter 11: When Are You Ready?

Chapter 12: How Present Are You?

Chapter 13: Do You Remember a Time when You Hesitated and Lost?

Chapter 14: Are You In, or Aren't You?

Section 4: Take Responsibility

Chapter 15: Want to Responsibly Scare Some People?

Chapter 16: How Much Blame Can You Take?

Chapter 17: What Difference Do You Make?

Chapter 18: What Kinds of Responsibility Are You Taking?

Chapter 19: Are You Truly Free?

Section 5: Acknowledge Progress

Chapter 20: How Goal-Driven Are You?

Chapter 21: Are You Too Harsh?

Chapter 22: Are You an Over-Recognizer?

Chapter 23: What, When, and How?

Chapter 24: Are You about Effort or Achievement?

Section 6: Commit to New Habits

Chapter 25: Just How Much Accountability Can One Person Stand?

Chapter 26: Do You Need to Be Committed?

Chapter 27: Just How Different Are You?

Chapter 28: What's That Weight on Your Back?

Section 7: Kindle

Chapter 29: Is It Really Just an e-Reader?

Chapter 30: How Are You Feeling?

Chapter 31: Did You Seriously Think That Would Work?

Chapter 32: Do You Ever Notice?

Chapter 33: Ever Given Birth?

Section 8: Now What?

Chapter 34: Do You Want To?

Chapter 35: Are You Willing?

Chapter 36: Can You Please Just Get On With It?

Index

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