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# Introduction

## *Beyond Balance*

*Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.*

—VIKTOR FRANKL

Out of control.” That’s how Sam, a divorced father of two girls and an ambitious professional, described his life. By day he managed an IT group for a health care conglomerate while dreaming of starting his own company. “I feel like I can never get it all done,” Sam continued. “I’m constantly distracted. I wish I could be under less stress and pay more attention to my daughters, especially as they’re getting into their teen years, and to my mom, who’s just been diagnosed with early-stage cancer.”

Sam looked down at his desk and shifted in his chair; he was in his home office. I could see only a part of it on the computer screen (we

were videoconferencing). His sense of being overwhelmed extended to his professional life. “I’m struggling to find the right partners who can help me develop and market an app I’ve designed that can make it easier for people to track their personal health habits,” he said, leaning forward. “I really believe that this thing can make a difference in people’s lives.”

It’s a full life, but at that moment Sam felt not so much full as stretched thin. He continued, “When I’m at work I’m worrying about Sophie and Erin, and when I have them on the weekends I’m online taking care of loose ends at work or trying to connect with leads for funding my start-up. I just don’t have enough time for it all. Yet I have this gnawing sense that I should be doing more with my life.”

Sam’s plight is not unique to busy managers. I often hear these sentiments, from adults young and old, whether they are executives, students, doctors, retailers, artisans, research scientists, soldiers, stay-at-home parents, teachers, or engineers—and whether they live in the United States or elsewhere. These are the chaotic, early days of the “twitch” era, in which we often feel as though we’re drowning in a deluge of data and yet can’t stop picking up our smartphones, checking our social media accounts, flailing in the wash of e-mails. Few of us are skilled enough psychologically to exploit the power of new communication tools, and it’s increasingly difficult to maintain the boundaries that allow us to give our projects the attention they require, and our people the care they deserve.

What’s more, social expectations for men and women are changing. Traditional norms are rapidly fading, leaving many people confused or disappointed (or both) about gender roles. Anne-Marie Slaughter’s inquiring *Atlantic* article of June 2012 (“Why Women Still Can’t Have It All”) sparked a fervent national conversation. It was stoked later that year with the decision by Yahoo! CEO Marissa Mayer to revoke the work-at-home option for the tech company’s employees. The fire was fanned by the book campaign of Facebook

COO Sheryl Sandberg, whose catchphrase (and book title) *Lean In* urges women not to step back from challenging careers. Women and men are hungry for help in figuring out how to navigate the turbulent modern-day waters of meaningful work, domestic responsibility, community engagement, and a satisfying inner life. No one seems to have the answers.

At the same time, economic pressures are forcing individuals, families, organizations, and communities to do more with less—or just to do less. Indeed, as I wrote last year in *Baby Bust: New Choices for Men and Women in Work and Family*, a study that compares the Wharton School's class of 1992 and the class of 2012, many young people are forsaking the opportunity to have or adopt children because they don't see how they can manage it. We remain in difficult financial times, in which large swaths of our economy have been disrupted, leaving millions displaced from their lines of work with diminished prospects for economic stability. Many of us may dream of achieving something significant in our life's work—something we can feel proud of—and yet find ourselves struggling to do so without shortchanging the people who count on us.

Perhaps you, like others, feel fragmented or discouraged. Perhaps you are looking for more purpose. You might have inklings about what to change, but you fear failure, or you fret about being selfish, or you can't stop the scramble to make ends meet, or you just don't know where to start.

## The Problem with “Work/Life Balance”

For nearly thirty years, my life's work has been to help people like you find ways to bring the often warring aspects of life into greater harmony. Toward that end, my research has focused on a fundamental misconception we all have about the “costs” of success. Many people believe that to achieve great things we must make brutal sacrifices;

that to succeed in work we must focus single-mindedly, at the expense of self, family, and society. Even those who reject the idea of a zero-sum game fall prey to a kind of binary thinking revealed by the term we use to describe the ideal lifestyle: *work/life balance*.

Work/life balance is a misguided metaphor for grasping the relationship between work and the rest of life; the image of the scale forces you to think in terms of trade-offs instead of the possibilities for harmony. And the idea that “work” competes with “life” ignores the more nuanced reality of our humanity. It ignores the fact that “life” is actually the intersection and interaction of the four domains of life: work or school; home or family; community or society; and the private realm of mind, body, and spirit. Of course, you can’t have it all—complete success in all the corners of your life, all at the same time. No one can. But even though it can seem impossible to bring these four domains into greater alignment, it doesn’t have to be impossible. Conflict and stress aren’t inevitable. Harmony is possible.

From years of studying people in many different settings, I have found that the most successful are those who can harness the passions and powers of the various parts of their lives, bringing them together to achieve what I call *four-way wins*: actions that result in life’s being better in all four domains. Successful people make it their business to be conscious of what and who matter most. Their actions flow from their values. They strive to do what they can to make things better for the people who depend on them and on whom they depend, in all the different parts of their lives.

## Integrating Work and the Rest of Life

Indeed, a set of discrete skills can help you find ways to integrate these four domains. You can learn these skills. And with practice you can master them. You can achieve a kind of integration that will, in turn, help you have the impact you want to have and lead a life

in which you stay true to yourself, serve others, and grow as a person. This integration is the key to leading a meaningful life—the one *you* want.

To replace conflict with a sense of completeness, or integrity, doesn't require turning your whole world upside down. Instead it requires figuring out how to take incremental steps that are under your control and that move you in the direction you want to go, while bringing others along with you. Doing this means thinking and talking about what truly inspires you, whatever in the world that might be—creating new products that improve the quality of life, teaching old folks how to dance, being recognized by your peers for your accomplishments, showing children how to read, having a reputation as a trustworthy person, solving problems or puzzles, being part of a team that takes pride in its achievements, reading about new ideas or old characters, growing vegetables, designing video games, coaching hockey, or talking about movies with your mother. In pursuing your passions, whether vocational or avocational, you can extract the special something that is unique about you and convert it into something that helps make others' lives a little better. It is not only thrilling to discover a way to do what you love and to love what you do, but it usually results in your having better market value, too.

It's not easy, especially if you're facing obstacles that loom large; and there's almost always disappointment and failure along the way. But it's a creative and rewarding process. I like to think of this creative process in musical terms. Imagine that you are a musician in a jazz quartet. You're trying to make good music. Your goal is to produce sounds that take your listener on a soul-touching journey. You have a theme, a direction you've chosen for each piece, around which the players improvise. Things happen along the way that you haven't planned or that you can't control, so you must listen and continually adjust your playing. Sometimes only the saxophone plays, and other times it's the piano and the bass, or the drums and the

saxophone, or only the drums. You're trying to bring them together, rhythm and melody, over a period of time to produce something uniquely beautiful and valuable. (In your case, the period of time is your entire life.)

When you start—or maybe even a long time after you start—your band fails to gel. The parts don't sync, the instruments clash, and individuals fail to meld into a whole. But you work with what you have, combining disciplined structure, practice, increasing competence, concentrated effort, dedicated commitment, and trial and error. You refine your skill so that you can produce the sound you hear inside your head, the melodies that stir your soul. Each instrument has its limits. Each has a specific contribution to make to the whole. For a jazz quartet to produce great music, discipline is as important as improvisation and serendipity. It's not magic, even if the result is often magical.

## Foundations

This book describes, illustrates, and teaches the specific skills you need to pursue four-way wins. Why these skills? Why not others? It's because the skills presented in this book are the ones that have proven to be the most effective in my three decades of teaching, research, and practice helping individuals—at all levels, in different stages of life, and across various spheres—integrate work and the rest of life.

In the 1980s I began asking the question, What does it take to bring together the different parts of life in mutually enriching ways? We launched the Work/Life Integration Project at the Wharton School, and in collaboration with leading scholars, practitioners, and policy makers, I initiated surveys and interviews, action research, and case studies in a wide variety of settings to find the answers. In a series of books and articles, I've shared the results of my studies

and tried to make these ideas available to the wider public. In 1998, with Jessica DeGroot and Perry Christensen, I edited a collection of learning activities, written for educators, to teach what we were starting to discover about the skills for integrating work and the rest of life; it was called *Integrating Work and Life: The Wharton Resource Guide*. My book *Work and Family—Allies or Enemies?* was written in 2000 with Jeffrey Greenhaus and based on large-scale survey research. It offered new ideas for actions that individuals could take to produce greater harmony among the different parts of life. With Sharon Lobel in 2005 I wrote an article, “The Happy Workaholic: A Role Model for Employees,” that described the practical lessons we uncovered in field research on senior executives who lead flexible and engaging work environments and the skills they use to do so. And in *Baby Bust*, mentioned earlier, using twenty-year longitudinal data comparing two generations of Wharton students, I explored the values and aspirations of millennials (those born between 1980 and 2000) and the skills they need to reshape our culture, our organizations, our communities, and our families.

## Being Real, Being Whole, Being Innovative

The most important part of the foundation for the skills in this book is Total Leadership, a program I developed at Ford Motor Company that later evolved into a course at Wharton. Total Leadership is a set of principles for achieving four-way wins and a sequence of exercises that flow from the principles. The idea of the Total Leadership program is to enhance your capacity to be a leader in all parts of life, and for you to transform yourself from feeling unfocused, fragmented, and stagnant to feeling inspired, connected with others, and excited about the future.

It starts with three principles: be real, be whole, and be innovative. To *be real* is to act with authenticity by clarifying what's important to you. It's about exploring your answer to this basic question: What matters most to me in my life? To *be whole* is to act with integrity by recognizing how the different parts of your life affect each other. This involves identifying who matters most to you at work, at home, and in the community; understanding what you need from each other; and seeing whether and how these needs mesh or don't mesh. All this examination allows you to *be innovative*. You act with creativity by experimenting with how things get done in ways that are good for you and for the people around you. You learn how to take small steps aimed at scoring four-way wins: improved performance at work, at home, in the community, and for your private self (mind, body, and spirit).

Since 2001, thousands of people have taken the program, at Wharton or elsewhere, at in-person workshops as well as online, including on a customized social learning site built especially for this course as well as in a MOOC (massive open online course) on Coursera.org, where over 54,000 students are enrolled as of this writing. In 2008, my book *Total Leadership: Be a Better Leader, Have a Richer Life*, attempted to put this program on the page. Tens of thousands of readers, in numerous languages (including Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Polish, Portuguese, and Russian), have used the book to help them lead more fulfilling lives. I often hear from former students and other Total Leadership alumni that they are sharing the ideas and exercises with their colleagues, family members, and friends. I came to see that this approach is equally effective for people who may or may not be MBA candidates, and who may or may not aspire to run companies, governments, or public service organizations. This approach can also help anyone who is feeling frazzled by the often-competing demands of work and the other parts of life. It can help people who have found success in their professional lives



but feel a nagging sense that they have failed to develop their spiritual selves. This approach—because it is entirely customized by each person who tries it—can help the many women and men who are disappointed that “having it all” is much harder than they thought when they were younger, as well as those, just starting out, who seem to have already concluded that they’ll have to settle for success in only one part of their lives.

My research has shown that there are ways for everyone—from the managers of sales teams, to executives in government agencies, to computer engineers, to florists, to coaches—to achieve professional success without always having to sacrifice the things that matter in their personal lives. Indeed, we’ve found that the opposite is true: sustainable professional success *results from* meaningful investments in the rest of life.

## Skills for Integrating Work and the Rest of Life

The *Total Leadership* book (and the Wharton course that shares its name) presents a structured program—step-by-step instruction, a process for setting goals and tracking progress, a series of exercises to complete in stages—to help you successfully pursue four-way wins. In contrast, this book drills down into specific skills for being real, being whole, and being innovative that you can learn and practice at any time. You can dip in and out of the process, focusing only on the skills you need most at any one time or in any specific situation. It’s not necessary for you to have read or done any of the exercises in *Total Leadership* (but the book is now available in paperback if you’re interested). You can start to produce greater harmony between work and the rest of your life with this book, assessing yourself on the skills and building them through specific exercises. You can learn and practice the skills either singly, or in small bunches, or all together.

The first step is to do a self-assessment in the next section to determine which skills most need your attention. Then you can choose to strengthen those that are weakest or build on those you've already mastered. As you read the description of each skill, think about how it plays out in your life. Which ones are your strengths, and which ones are weaknesses? If I were to ask people who know you well, what would they say about whether each skill is true of you? And how might things be different if you practiced each of these skills in your everyday life?

As you review these skills—don't score yourself yet—you might wonder whether they are easy for me to describe but difficult for you to develop. Let me ask you to take a leap of faith: don't worry too much about that right now; instead, try to approach them with curiosity and an open mind.

### *Skills for Being Real*

The first of the three Total Leadership principles is to be real—to act with authenticity by clarifying what's important to you. This is the foundation—your values and your vision of the future you want to create.

#### KNOW WHAT MATTERS.

*You know how important each of the different aspects of your life is to you.* Your high self-awareness enables you to understand and clearly describe the value of each of the roles you play—worker, spouse, parent, sibling, son or daughter, friend, or citizen. You are also able to see the bigger picture, in which all your different roles in life contribute to your vision of the future.

#### EMBODY VALUES CONSISTENTLY.

*You are able to be yourself wherever you are, wherever you go. You act in ways that are consistent with your core values.* You have taken the

time to get comfortable in your own skin. This confidence allows you to be yourself wherever you are. Rather than conform to external pressures, you rely on your internal compass to guide your words and deeds. Rather than bend to social pressures, you make choices that match your values, and you are not afraid to share your opinions.

#### ALIGN ACTIONS WITH VALUES.

*You make choices about how to spend your time and energy in ways that match what you really care about.* This skill allows you to think about your goals so that you have a clear understanding of them, making it easier for you to prioritize. You understand how what you do each day fits with your values, so you are able to persevere when things get rough. You also know when and how to say no. You do not let feelings of guilt force you to take on things that are not true to what you stand for.

#### CONVEY VALUES WITH STORIES.

*You tell stories about the key people and events that have shaped your values in a way that binds you to others.* You can pinpoint episodes in your life that have shaped your values. You allow others to gain insight into the person you are and where you've been by sharing your stories. You display both confidence and vulnerability by opening yourself up. This lays the foundation for building relationships based on mutual appreciation and trust.

#### ENVISION YOUR LEGACY.

*You have a vision for where you are headed and the legacy you want to leave.* You know not only where you've been, but also where you're going. You can paint a vivid picture of the life you want to lead, visualizing yourself in ten and even twenty years. Not only do you have a vision of the future, but you also have ideas that excite you about how to achieve that vision, even if you don't have all of the details figured out.

## HOLD YOURSELF ACCOUNTABLE.

*You hold yourself accountable for doing what is most important to you in your life.* You don't let weeks or months pass by without reflecting on what matters. You routinely evaluate whether you are living according to your values. If you notice that you are doing things that are not important to you, you adjust your actions so that they line up better with your values. At the very least, you are willing to try to take steps to ensure that you are pursuing a life that matches what matters most.

*Skills for Being Whole*

The second Total Leadership principle is to be whole—to act with integrity (the Latin root is *integer*, which means whole or complete) by respecting all the different parts that constitute the whole person, ensuring that you and the people who inhabit these realms are clear about what you need from each other and are willing to provide it.

## CLARIFY EXPECTATIONS.

*You communicate with people important to you about expectations you have of each other, and you make sure these expectations are clear.* You are willing to express your needs, values, and goals to those you care about. You are willing to set aside time for these conversations and are able to broach topics that may feel uncomfortable at first. You are an active listener who is also willing to hear constructive feedback, ask clarifying questions, and work to resolve disagreements.

## HELP OTHERS.

*You look for opportunities to help many different people.* You are generous and caring in key relationships in your life. Whether these relationships are with colleagues, neighbors, friends, or family, you see

that it's fun and fruitful to help other people. You view relationships as a means for enriching your own life *and* the lives of others.

#### BUILD SUPPORTIVE NETWORKS.

*You are able to convince people to support you in your goals.* You are able to tap into your personal and professional networks for support of what's important. With your enthusiasm and passion—and your reputation for going out of your way to connect people—you convince others to support you. You do not need to manipulate others to gain their support; it is offered freely because others share your vision of the future and want to help you realize it.

#### APPLY ALL YOUR RESOURCES.

*You use skills and contacts from different parts of your life to help meet any need or goal.* When pursuing your goals, you are able to think creatively about the resources you have developed in the various domains of your life. You do not force your relationships into rigidly defined categories or roles. Instead, you draw on assets—other people, your own talents, what you have learned—from different parts of your life to get things done.

#### MANAGE BOUNDARIES INTELLIGENTLY.

*You are able to delineate and maintain boundaries between the different parts of your life.* You not only know when to merge the different aspects of your life, but you also know when to segment, or separate, them. You are able to decide when it is beneficial to create boundaries that allow for concentration on a single goal or responsibility. Despite the 24/7 connectivity we all have to work, family, and other relationships through technology, you are able to turn your attention to one thing at a time when you need to do so, rather than try to accomplish everything at once.

## WEAVE DISPARATE STRANDS.

*You are able to weave together the pieces of your life so that it has coherence.* You view the different aspects of your life as interconnected in a way that is mutually enriching. You see how your different roles complement each other. You have a sense that all aspects of your life are integral parts of who you are; they all fit together as one. You understand how the various parts you play enable you to realize your vision.

*Skills for Being Innovative*

The third principle is to be innovative—to act with creativity and courage in continually experimenting with how things get done, bringing others along with you as you progress toward goals that matter.

## FOCUS ON RESULTS.

*You focus on the results of your efforts to accomplish goals and are flexible about the means for achieving them.* You keep your eyes on the prize. When evaluating your progress, you don't count the hours you've logged but instead look to whether or not you are producing a positive outcome. You judge yourself and others by your accomplishments and emphasize quality instead of quantity of effort.

## RESOLVE CONFLICTS AMONG DOMAINS.

*You seek creative solutions to conflicts rather than sacrifice one part of life for another.* You realize that the different aspects of your life are not competing with one another, that it's not a zero-sum game. You don't accept the notion that engaging in one area of your life must always require sacrifices in the others. Instead, you look for ways to create win-win solutions that meet multiple goals.

**CHALLENGE THE STATUS QUO.**

*You challenge traditional assumptions about how things are done, experimenting to make things better whenever possible.* You are not constrained by conventions about how others think things should be done. Rather than follow the pack, you are willing to think and act like a rogue. You are not overly concerned about how others will perceive you. Instead, you are willing to step out on a limb to find a creative solution to the challenges you face.

**SEE NEW WAYS OF DOING THINGS.**

*You are willing to question old habits and innovate in managing life's demands.* You do not allow long-standing routines to dictate how you live your life. You are willing to try new approaches to see whether there are opportunities for greater performance in, and cohesiveness between, the different aspects of your life. You are willing to question your behaviors and to experiment with creative solutions for managing day-to-day as well as long-term goals.

**EMBRACE CHANGE COURAGEOUSLY.**

*You look forward to change—seeing it as an opportunity—rather than fear it.* You embrace opportunities for personal development. Rather than follow a strictly defined path, you realize that life takes unexpected twists and turns. You are confident that you will be able not only to survive the unexpected but also to thrive in new circumstances.

**CREATE CULTURES OF INNOVATION.**

*You look for opportunities to encourage others to learn new ways of doing things.* You encourage innovation wherever you go. Leading by example, you empower others to think creatively. You display both confidence and humility as you share with others your successes as

well as the obstacles you face. Your enthusiasm for learning is contagious, and your courage inspires others to seek out new opportunities.

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Although we've not gotten into specific examples of how these skills are applied—that's a big part of what the rest of the book is about—reading these basic descriptions should give you an initial understanding of these skills. Now let me ask you to review them again, this time assessing yourself on each one. Rate yourself by writing next to each skill a number from 1 to 5, using the scale shown, that best describes whether you agree or disagree that the skill is a particular strength of yours. You can do this online using a tool developed in partnership with Qualtrics at [www.qualtrics.com/totalleadership](http://www.qualtrics.com/totalleadership).

1 = **Strongly Disagree**

2 = **Disagree**

3 = **Neutral**

4 = **Agree**

5 = **Strongly Agree**

If your total score is greater than 85, then I recommend you return this book, although it still might be fun for you to learn more about the people profiled here, who exemplify these skills (see the next section for more detail on the profiles). And please get in touch with me so that I can discover how you've mastered and applied these skills in your life.

If, on the other hand, you're like most of us—with a score between 35 and 85—then you have room to improve. And improve you can. This may seem like a lot to absorb, and some of these skills may be more obvious to you than others. In the chapters that follow, I flesh out these skills for being real, being whole, and being innovative, describing and analyzing how six remarkable men and women exemplify them in their lives. You will learn how these skills have allowed these



people, each in his or her own way, to mature over time into leaders of significance, to make their mark, and to find meaning in their lives.

## Profiles of People Who Exemplify These Skills

To help you learn the skills and see them in action, the book starts, in Part I, with the stories of six extraordinary people: Tom Tierney, Sheryl Sandberg, Eric Greitens, Michelle Obama, Julie Foudy, and Bruce Springsteen (see “Six Models” for an introduction to these six people and the reasons they were chosen for this book). These individuals have found ways to integrate work and the rest of life, to achieve four-way wins, and to bring different areas of their lives into greater harmony. Taken together, the six exemplars illustrate what each skill looks like in action.

These profiles are based on extensive research into public information available—biographies, articles, books, and recorded interviews—as well as my own observations and interviews with the subject or individuals close to the subject. My goal is not to tell their entire life stories or provide complete pictures of them but rather to highlight key episodes in their lives that personify these skills. In this way, we can learn from their example how to apply the skills in our own lives.

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### Six Models

Each of these six models is a complicated mix of drives and desires, wants and weaknesses, confidence and self-scrutiny—just like you and me. And all of them are evolving. Let me introduce them and the skills they exemplify so you can begin to explore what you can learn from their lives, as led so far.

**Tom Tierney**

*Envision Your Legacy, Weave Disparate Strands, See New Ways of Doing Things*

Tom Tierney is the chairman and co-founder of The Bridgespan Group, former CEO of the powerhouse global consulting firm Bain & Company, and co-author of the philanthropy guide *Give Smart*. Throughout his accomplished career, Tierney has sought creative ways of fitting together the domains of his life, including learning from his children about what really matters. He has built organizations that encourage personal growth by, for example, rewarding results and not face time and by motivating people with an inspiring vision of contribution to a greater good.

**Sheryl Sandberg**

*Convey Values with Stories, Build Supportive Networks, Resolve Conflicts among Domains*

As COO of Facebook, Sheryl Sandberg has redefined what it means to be a leader. Especially now, following the launch of her book-cum-social movement, *Lean In*, she is a powerful advocate for new models for women's advancement in society, ideas she conveys with the confidence of a seasoned storyteller. Her candor about the challenges she faces in resolving conflicts among different parts of her life—as an executive, a catalyst for social change, a friend, a wife, a sister, and a mother—and about the nontraditional means she employs for doing so, make her a persuasive, if not controversial, role model.

**Eric Greitens**

*Hold Yourself Accountable, Apply All Your Resources, Focus on Results*

Former Navy SEAL Eric Greitens, humanitarian, author, and founder of a nonprofit organization, has experienced many lifetimes' worth of adventure. He graduated from Duke, was both a Rhodes Scholar and a Truman scholar, and attended Oxford. After completing his

PhD, Greitens forsook high-paying career opportunities for a chance to become a Navy SEAL, enduring a stint of military training often referred to as the hardest in the world. For his service in Iraq he was awarded a Purple Heart, and—after a difficult search for a meaningful next step to take—he went on to found The Mission Continues, an organization that helps heal wounded war veterans by guiding them to be of service in their communities.

### **Michelle Obama**

*Align Actions with Values, Manage Boundaries  
Intelligently, Embrace Change Courageously*

Michelle Obama, the current First Lady of the United States and the first African American woman in this position, stepped carefully into the role. The self-described Mom-in-Chief explains that she considers her daughters to be her first priority, even if this stance rankles those who would have her do more in seeking broader political and cultural change. In making sure her own children were receiving the most nutritious food possible, she began to advocate for better nutrition through the national initiative Let's Move! Her policies have won national acclaim.

### **Julie Foudy**

*Know What Matters, Help Others, Challenge the Status Quo*

Julie Foudy is a soccer champion who, in 1991, as a member of the US national team, won the first Women's World Cup. She was part of the iconic US soccer team that garnered Olympic gold in 1996, silver in 2000, and gold again in 2004. But Foudy is in this book because of what she has done beyond the soccer field. She has led an array of organizations that promote athletics for young people, empower young women, and advocate for social causes. Foudy's success is an outgrowth of her passion for soccer, her insistence on pursuing the most fruitful expression of her talents, and her ability to fuse all the important parts of her life—her soccer teams, her family, and her advocacy for worthy causes.

**Bruce Springsteen**

*Embody Values Consistently, Clarify Expectations,  
Create Cultures of Innovation*

Although it may seem counterintuitive to think of a rock-and-roll hero as an exemplary leader, Bruce Springsteen is the real deal. Springsteen has said that he creates music “to make people happy, feel less lonely, but also [to be] a conduit for a dialogue about the events of the day, the issues that impact people’s lives, personal and social and political and religious.”<sup>1</sup> With his hard-won clarity of purpose, derived from years of painful self-scrutiny, it follows naturally that he makes clear what he expects from the people around him, whether members of his band or members of his family. He’s called “The Boss” for a reason.

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## Learning from Their Example

Why did I decide to profile these six people as models for how to integrate work and the rest of life? As someone known as “the work/life balance guy,” I get push-back almost everywhere I go, especially from high achievers. “Stew, it’s nice to try to balance it all,” they say to me, “but in the real world, c’mon: how can you have a substantial impact without making major sacrifices in your personal and family life?” I wanted to provide an answer to those who kept asking me for examples of people who have achieved great things and who are, in the common parlance, “balanced.”

I set out to find familiar figures, role models (though certainly not universally liked) who have practiced, wittingly or unwittingly, the skills for integrating work and life, and who could help teach us all how we can cultivate these skills. The skills they’ve developed would enable any of us to be leaders living our lives on our own terms.

I began by generating a list of people who have demonstrated what it means to be real, to be whole, and to be innovative. I drew on biographies composed by my students, conversations with friends and colleagues, and my own research.<sup>2</sup> I culled the list many times to arrive, finally, at six men and women from different sectors (business, public service, and sports and entertainment).

There is no way, of course, that these few can be fully representative. I chose them as illustrative models. You don't have to identify with them to learn from their examples. You might even be tempted to shrug them off, because it's not easy to relate to people who have all the money in the world, beautiful and supportive spouses, bosses who really care about them, or supersized native talents. But their stories will open you up to new ways of thinking and acting. I'm sure you can think of others, and I hope you do; finding your own models will deepen your grasp of the skills in this book and of their practical value to you.

In each of their stories I found naturally occurring illustrations of people who did great things by discovering—usually through trial and error—ways to integrate the different parts of their lives so that they reinforced and enhanced each other. This book describes highlights of their life stories to show that even though they seem on the surface to be unusually talented, or just lucky, they are actually flawed people who have been engaged in a lifelong quest to align aspects of their lives through specific behaviors. Each chapter tells selected events of a life and analyzes how one person applied specific skills to carve a unique path. My analysis of each case will show you how to use these stories as guides. The first challenge for you in reading this book is to be curious about how their choices help you consider those you face. The second challenge is to start to practice the skills that have enabled them to lead the lives they truly want.

Still, you might be asking, Does it really make sense to try to learn leadership and life lessons from such extraordinary human beings?

These are not everyday people. But if you think their success derives only from great luck, think again. Not one of them was born into a life of high privilege. They have strived to achieve their own kind of greatness and, in one way or another, to make themselves into the people they are now. Each has suffered disappointment (half of them are on second marriages), frustration, doubt, and loss. They're human, after all. I imagine you will see possibilities for yourself in all of them.

These narratives show how accomplishment in a career is achievable not at the expense of the rest of your life, but because of commitments at home, in the community, and to your interior life. Each of these people is imperfect, more like you and me than you might imagine. Each has had a significant impact on the world beyond family, work, and the private self. And each strives to lead a meaningful life. All have made choices that integrate the different parts of their lives. This, in turn, results in both professional success and a full life that inspires them and enhances the lives of others.

Skeptics take heed. The lives of these sterling men and women in business (Tom Tierney and Sheryl Sandberg), in public service (Eric Greitens and Michelle Obama), and in sports and entertainment (Julie Foudy and Bruce Springsteen) defy the myth of the zero-sum game, in which success in your career means failure in the rest of your life, and vice versa. All of them, like the rest of us, have struggled, and their examples will help you see how you can cultivate a life in which values, actions, social contributions, and personal growth exist in harmony, like a great piece of jazz music. This is a life in which disparate pieces fall into place, not every day—that's the impossible myth of "work/life balance"—but over the course of time. Like these six, you can attain significant achievement in a way that fits the person you are. Indeed you must, because, as these leaders prove, your own way is the only way that will work for you.

## How to Use This Book

*Leading the Life You Want* offers a new way of thinking as well as new practices that you can use now. Its purpose is to help you develop the skills you need to lead a life that you define as successful. In Part I, you'll look at how each of the six models has found a very personal way to pursue four-way wins—to integrate the different domains in mutually enriching ways—over the course of their lives. You'll see how, knowingly or intuitively, they learned, practiced, and applied discrete skills to achieve harmony in their complicated lives.

Even though each of their lives is different from yours, you will find ways to apply the lessons to your situation. These examples will help you muster the courage to initiate significant change because it's good for you as well as for the people around you. You can pick and choose which stories are of greatest interest, and you can read them in whatever order makes sense for you.

As you prepare to read about these great leaders, keep your baseline self-assessment at the ready as a point of reference. Take notes on how you see these skills in action in the lives of the people profiled here. As you read, write down your ideas about questions that arise, such as these:

- What is Tom Tierney's method for focusing on his legacy?
- How does Sheryl Sandberg's commitment to creating connections in the service of women's advancement help her company?
- When does Eric Greitens hold himself accountable for achieving meaningful results?
- Why does Michelle Obama manage the boundaries among her different roles?

TABLE I-1

**Skills for integrating work and the rest of life illustrated by six models**

Total Leadership principles	Tom Tierney	Sheryl Sandberg	Eric Greitens	Michelle Obama	Julie Foudy	Bruce Springsteen
<b>Be real</b> <i>Act with authenticity</i>	Envision your legacy.	Convey values with stories.	Hold yourself accountable.	Align actions with values.	Know what matters.	Embody values consistently.
<b>Be whole</b> <i>Act with integrity</i>	Weave disparate strands.	Build supportive networks.	Apply all your resources.	Manage boundaries intelligently.	Help others.	Clarify expectations.
<b>Be innovative</b> <i>Act with creativity</i>	See new ways of doing things.	Resolve conflicts among domains.	Focus on results.	Embrace change courageously.	Challenge the status quo.	Create cultures of innovation.



- How did Julie Foudy figure out what was important to her?
- What does Bruce Springsteen do to encourage innovation?

Then, Part II drills down into those skills, giving you simple ways to develop them yourself. You'll find concrete, actionable ideas—curated from the applied research in organizational psychology and related fields—for what you can do now to practice these skills. You don't need tons of money, the best boss, the most supportive spouse, or the greatest talent to apply these skills and thereby live with a richer sense of significance, strengthened resilience, and a more hopeful outlook on the future. It may not be possible to have it all—indeed, it surely is not—but with this set of skills it is possible to have more of it.

These skills may be useful, too, if you want to show others how they can act in ways that make things better not only for them personally but also for their families, their communities, *and* their work.

You can decide which skills to focus on first, based on your own analysis of the skills you most want to develop. Use table I-1 to locate where in the book each skill is illustrated by our models.

Leading the life you want is a craft. As with music or writing or dance, or any athletic endeavor, you can always get better at it. Some of us start with greater natural assets than others—a strong body, a gift for creative thinking, a conscientious personality, or mathematical ability. Some of us are helped by genetic endowment and by what we have learned from parents, role models, and mentors. But this capacity can be learned by any individual. In fact, it must be.

As you'll see next, in Part I, it is the drive to take what they have and use it to enrich the world around them that has given our six models the will to compose, just as an author does, their own stories. Let's see how they have exploited the power of getting the different parts of their lives humming together.



PART I

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Models for  
Integrating Work  
and the  
Rest of Life



# 1

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## Tom Tierney

*Envision Your Legacy,  
Weave Disparate Strands,  
See New Ways of Doing Things*

**I**t's still dark outside when Tom Tierney rises in his home outside Boston on a December morning. He dresses quietly, so as not to wake his wife, Karen, and goes to the kitchen to brew some coffee. At fifty-nine, Tierney is trim and retains a certain boyishness, helped by the rimless glasses, a full head of hair, and boundless energy. He carries a mug and the fresh pot into his office and closes the door. It's 5:15 a.m., time to begin the ritual of writing what he calls his "annual review."

The term reflects Tierney's lifetime in business: the Harvard MBA, two decades at the consulting firm Bain & Company (including eight years as chief executive), and fourteen years as cofounder and guiding spirit of the nonprofit Bridgespan. But he doesn't write this personal document with the notion that it should be legible for

anybody else. “It’s just for me,” he told me in a long interview a few years ago.<sup>1</sup> “I ask how I spent my time. And I ask how I’m doing. And then I ask, ‘Where am I going with all this? How can I be better? What are my priorities for the next year? Five years? Ten years?’” The annual review is more than a career assessment; it might include personal goals or thoughts about how his two sons are doing. The ritual reflects the qualities that Tierney is known for: discipline, self-reflection, an ability to think big and creatively, and a dedication to personal development, his own and others’.

As he works, he goes back through journal entries that he’s written on cross-country flights and in other spare moments. Tierney, who has been journaling for decades, believes the practice helps him record meaningful data. “I keep track of every single travel day, of every day that I’m home after seven, and of how many nights I’m away and what’s causing that.” But it also helps him think through bigger life questions, track his progress toward long-term goals, and capture ideas and dreams about what might be.

In an entry from 1988, for instance, Tierney—who was then running the San Francisco office of Bain & Company—wrote about what he called a “Make a Difference Company.” The idea percolated in Tierney’s mind and kept surfacing in his journal until 1999, when Bridgespan was born, initially as a start-up incubated within Bain.

The Bridgespan Group is most easily described as a nonprofit version of Bain Consulting—an organization that provides services such as strategic consulting and leadership development to philanthropists, foundations, and nonprofit organizations. Now in its second decade, Bridgespan helps many nonprofit clients and is what Duke University’s Joel Fleishman (a Tierney coauthor) calls “the gold standard in nonprofit consulting.”<sup>2</sup> That category hardly existed at its founding, but today the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (a Bridgespan client) and hundreds of other ventures in social entrepreneurialism have joined Bridgespan in chipping away at the notion

that standard practices from the for-profit world—let alone successful business leaders—have no place in philanthropy and the social sector.

When Tierney left his job as Worldwide Managing Director at Bain & Company in 2000 for Bridgespan it was, he said, “not a natural act.” Yet Tierney has always believed that the notion of a person’s predetermined track is “hogwash.” Instead, he said, “You’re on your own track.”<sup>3</sup>

## Building His Own Track

Tom Tierney was born in San Francisco, the older of two boys. His father had gone to college thanks to the GI Bill and worked at a Colgate-Palmolive factory that manufactured toothpaste. His mother, nominally a stay-at-home mom, volunteered for a long time as president of Sunny Hills Junior Auxiliary, helping troubled high school girls for as many as forty hours a week.<sup>4</sup> Tierney’s family was solidly working class. “I remember being aware of the fact that we didn’t have a new car and other families did,” Tierney said. When he asked about this, his father told him, “It’s not what you have in life that matters, it’s who you are. And who you are in life is dependent not on what you say, but what you do.”

College didn’t initially appeal to Tierney; he dreamed of joining the Peace Corps. But his parents felt strongly about it, so strongly that the elder Tierney filled out much of his son’s college application forms.<sup>5</sup> Tom Tierney was accepted at the University of California at Davis, where he arrived as a freshman in the fall of 1972, planning to major in engineering. But some early science classes didn’t bode well. He recalls seeing the results of an exam for a chemistry class, when the long list of grades was posted on a wall, with the best scores at the top. He found his name near the bottom. “I don’t want to be here,” he thought. “I don’t know why I am here. This is hard. I’m not smart enough. I don’t know how to work any harder. Do I drop out?”

Walking home that day along a bike path, he heard someone whistling behind him. When he turned to look, he saw a fellow student in a wheelchair. “If he can whistle,” Tierney thought, “I can whistle.” Tierney stayed in school, although he switched his major to economics, graduating with honors. Unsure of the next step, he kept his job driving a bus, a job he’d had all through college.<sup>6</sup> It was a great job, he’s told many audiences since. But he itched to travel. He had crossed the California border only twice: bound once for Reno, Nevada, and once for Tijuana. So after bumping into a friend whose father worked for Bechtel, he applied for a job at the global engineering firm.

“When the guy gave me the job,” Tierney recalled decades later, “he said, ‘We’re going to send you to Algeria.’ And I must have had this funny look, because he said, ‘You don’t know where that is, do you?’ I said, ‘Sir, I don’t, but I’m sure it’s not in California.’”<sup>7</sup> Less than two weeks later, Tierney landed in the northern African country as the newest field engineer at the construction site of one of the world’s largest natural gas plants.<sup>8</sup> The assignment allowed him to acquire project-management skills, and his two years there, he says, gave him “ten years of experience.” During vacations, he traveled throughout North, West, and East Africa, as well as to Europe and the Mediterranean. The period, as he put it to the authors of a Harvard Business School case, taught him “a lot about people and a lot about life.”<sup>9</sup>

But when Bechtel offered Tierney a three-year contract to build facilities at a new natural gas site in the Sahara, he was ready for a change. He applied to business school, earning a spot at Harvard. “I was the only Algerian application that year,” he told my Wharton class, explaining how he got in. “And I aced the TOEFL exam.”<sup>10</sup>

Tierney, who had wanted to go to Stanford Business School but didn’t get in, felt hesitant about going to an Ivy League institution. But his mother, who had never been to college or to New England,



told him, “If you can get into Harvard, you should go to Harvard.” So he did. Harvard Business School felt more foreign to Tierney than Algeria. “I understood construction, I understood blue collar stuff, I was very, very comfortable swearing,” he recalled in a 2012 business school talk. “And [I] end up in Cambridge, which was different. Quite a bit different. I had to wear a coat, and some people called me Mister Tierney. It was bizarre.”<sup>11</sup>

## Growing Up at Bain

Tierney says that he initially “struggled through business school,” although he did well enough to land a job at Bain after graduating with distinction in 1980, in the top 10 percent of his class. But the feeling of being a social misfit followed him to Bain. People who worked closely with the budding executive admired his integrity and discipline. They recognized his value to the firm. But in the eyes of some partners, Tierney didn’t look like an executive, nor did he act like one. At his first review, he was told that of the twenty-five associates hired in his year, the partners had ranked him twenty-fifth. He told me that the partner reviewing him said, “I know you’re rough. I just don’t know if there is a diamond in there.”

But Tierney took heart. There had been no criticism of his work, only of superficial things like his appearance, his lack of polish, his behavior. Tierney, who has since described Bain as his “finishing school,” knew that he could learn to be an executive. And with dedicated effort and coaching, he did, becoming a partner in three years—a record.

Although Tierney was thrilled to make partner, the transition was no easier than his initial entry into the firm or into HBS. “You would expect a partner to be a paragon of wisdom and experience; I was twenty-nine years old. You would expect a partner to be polished and smooth like a Wall Street lawyer or investment banker; I was anything

but,” he said in the HBS case. It was a job he had to grow into. He began taking sales training classes and hired a clothing consultant. He was told in no uncertain terms to get rid of his white socks. Not a natural rainmaker, he left the client schmoozing to other partners and gravitated toward work that played to his strengths, becoming what he describes as the “unofficial chief operating officer” of the San Francisco office. He began managing professional development and helped institute a new performance-review system.

As a manager, Tierney encouraged employees not to work all the time or let their vacation days languish. “You want to have people there for years and years and years,” he said to me, reflecting on his philosophy. “You want them to be productive. You want them not to burn out. You don’t want people to turn into little piles of dust. They have to be fulfilled on multiple dimensions.”<sup>12</sup>

This was a period of personal growth for Tierney as well. He had fallen in love with Karen McGee, a television executive, and, in 1984, the couple married. In 1987—the same year their first son, Colin, was born—Tierney, then thirty-three, was promoted to head of the one-hundred-person San Francisco office. Although he prided himself on his project-management skills, not all of his colleagues appreciated them, and one day a young partner came to his office, uninvited, to give him feedback. “You’re a steamroller,” she told Tierney. “You’re rolling over people. You’re being too controlling.”<sup>13</sup> That young partner was Meg Whitman, current CEO of Hewlett-Packard.

She was right, Tierney realized after thinking about her comments for a couple of days. He loosened his management style, focusing not on what the members of his team were doing but on what he could do to help them succeed. John Donahoe, current CEO of eBay, also worked in the San Francisco office at the time; like most consultants, he spent most of his week on the road visiting clients. Donahoe reached a critical juncture at Bain, he told me recently, when his

wife earned a prestigious year-long clerkship that would have made it impossible for her to take the couple's children to school. He went to Tierney to explain that he could no longer travel and would have to resign. "You're an idiot. You don't need to quit," Tierney said to him. "We'll get you a local client."<sup>14</sup> There weren't any local clients, Donahoe pointed out, but Tierney promised to find one—and within two weeks, he had. Donahoe stayed at Bain, working part-time that year, and went on to succeed Tierney as head of the San Francisco office.

If the first few months as head of the office had tested Tierney's leadership skills, they also tested his ability to live the kind of life he valued: being with his wife and sons, giving back to the community, and carving out quiet moments for himself. Time, Tierney says, is a scarce resource. "The job will not say, 'You are doing too much work, you need to cut back,'" he said. "A three-year-old will not tell you, 'I need a bigger share of your time.'"<sup>15</sup>

To ensure that he was spending his days wisely, Tierney created what he calls "magnets": commitments that he took as seriously as a partner meeting. One magnet was exercise; Tierney set out time exclusively for himself every morning for a workout. His wife and sons represented a second magnet, and, to protect his time with them, Tierney decided that he would not go into the office on weekends. "Over the course of my career, I maybe went into the office on a weekend ten to fifteen times," he told me. That doesn't mean he never did any work on weekends. He might read something or answer e-mails, but any work had to fit around his family's weekend activities, from Little League and soccer games to Boy Scout camping trips.

Tierney also began exploring avenues for community service. He started volunteering for the United Way of the Bay Area, an effort that led to Bain's first pro bono client. Tierney eventually joined the nonprofit's board, the first of several on which he would serve.

## The Struggle to Rebuild

In his thirties, everything appeared to be falling into place for Tierney. He was happily married. He loved fatherhood, once telling me (while struggling to hold back tears) that raising a family “opens up what’s important.”<sup>16</sup> He had succeeded at Bain far beyond the partners’ early expectations, and Bain itself was expanding rapidly. By the early 1980s, Bain had about forty vice presidents as well as offices in Boston, San Francisco, London, Tokyo, and Munich. But not everything was as it seemed. In the mid-1980s, Bain’s seven directors—who together owned the firm—had created an employee stock plan that would distribute shares, giving a greater number of employees an ownership stake. The directors sold 30 percent of the company’s shares to the newly created stock trust, which bought the shares through bank loans that would be paid with cash from Bain’s revenues. But Bain’s growth slumped along with the rest of the economy in the late 1980s, and the company didn’t react quickly enough. Accustomed to fast growth, Bain, in Tierney’s words, “had an accelerator but no brake.”<sup>17</sup> Soon the company’s liabilities—including rent, salaries, and debt related to the stock plan—threatened the firm’s future. Only the small group of directors knew exactly how bad things were.

In 1990, Tierney learned the truth. “It was devastating,” he recalled. “My first thoughts were, ‘I’m wiped out. I have a mortgage to pay on my house. I have a three-year-old child. My wife has quit her job to be a full-time mom. I head an office of one hundred professionals whose future is now in jeopardy.’”<sup>18</sup>

For several weeks, Tierney grappled with whether to stay or go. “Sometime during the weeks of indecision, the issue stopped being about money or my job; seeing this through became an issue of values, integrity, and reputation,” he recalled. “I decided that no matter what, I would do my part to help Bain succeed.”<sup>19</sup> He vowed to stay with the company until it was on stronger footing and then leave.

Mitt Romney, then head of Bain's sister company, Bain Capital, stepped in as interim CEO to help get the consulting firm back on its feet. By the fall of 1991, the financial restructuring was essentially complete and Romney was itching to return to Bain Capital. But first the consulting firm needed a new leader. Romney, among others, wanted that leader to be Tierney. This posed yet another moment of soul-searching for Tierney. "Faced with a choice like that, what do you do? Me, I pray. And I talk to my wife. We talked and talked and talked."<sup>20</sup> Eventually he agreed to become president and chief operating officer of the company for a trial year.

During that year, Tierney officially lived in San Francisco, but he spent 220 nights on the road, tending to Bain's offices around the world. "I killed myself traveling. At some points I felt like I was running for office," he said. "At other points, I felt like I was just bailing out a leaky boat as fast as I could just to keep it afloat."<sup>21</sup> One day that June, Tierney arrived home from a two-week business trip, to be greeted by his wife Karen and an ultimatum: "You're gone all the time. We've got a five year-old son. This isn't going to work. Something's got to change."<sup>22</sup> The partners in Boston wanted a change, too. They needed the head of the firm back in Boston. So, for professional and personal reasons, the Tierneys moved east.

The company was still in decline, and, in contrast to his role in the San Francisco office, where he knew everyone well, Tierney was now running a global organization and herding partners, most of whom didn't know him personally and some of whom hadn't voted for him to take the helm. Tierney had to learn how to "exert influence as opposed to control" and how to manage "by remote control," as he told me.<sup>23</sup> It was a challenging time.

But the firm was on sounder financial footing, and, as the economy picked up, so did Bain's fortunes. The firm grew at 30 percent a year from 1992 through 1998, a year in which Bain raked in more than \$500 million in revenues.<sup>24</sup> Tierney oversaw a global expansion,

adding fourteen offices around the world, and instituted an internal training program to ensure that “Bainees” at every level were continuing to learn.

Still, that business success took a toll on Tierney’s family, which now included a second son, Braden. “I don’t know anybody who, later in their career, says, ‘I wish I’d spent five percent more time at work and five percent less time with my family,’” said Tierney in 2008. “I don’t think I’ve ever heard that sentence. Kids make that trade-off starker. There’s a cost to it. If I’m not there, I’m just not there. I can’t say, ‘I’ll make it up to you when you’re forty.’”<sup>25</sup> Tierney tried to be as present as possible for his family. “He’s taken more red-eyes than your average person,” Karen, his wife, told me. And when he had to leave, “we could always count on a little love note left on the kitchen counter.”<sup>26</sup>

Looking back at that period, Tierney described it as “extremely stressful and not always healthy” and admits he doesn’t know how much longer he could have sustained it.<sup>27</sup> “My moment came in the mid-nineties,” Tierney told John Kobara, when “a very, very thoughtful person asked me, ‘What if you had ten years to live? Would you keep doing what you’re doing?’” That person was John Gardner, who, as secretary of health in the Johnson administration, helped create Medicare and later went on to found Common Cause. Gardner’s question stuck with Tierney, who kept asking himself, “What is my life about? What’s my legacy?” “He’s on my short list of heroes,” said Tierney of Gardner, adding that Gardner’s questions “gave me courage to follow my path.”<sup>28</sup>

## Crossing the Bridge

In October 1999, Tierney sat down to record a voice mail to Bain’s two hundred partners around the world. He told them that he would not seek a third term as CEO and, moreover, that he was going

half-time to give more of himself to Bridgespan. He had co-written the business plan for the nonprofit while at Bain. In fact, the company had supported his effort, bringing his Bridgespan cofounder, Jeff Bradach, on to the payroll in the early months and giving the fledgling team office space.

Soon after Tierney sent the voice mail, two partners came into his Boston office, closed the door, and asked him if he was OK. “They honestly thought I’d received bad news from the doctor,” he told me recently. “To leave this company that was growing thirty-five percent per year, with twenty-two hundred people in twenty-plus countries? It was going well—I had all these perks.” To join a start-up charity with three other people for no pay struck the partners as irrational.

Next, he received a call from a headhunter in Silicon Valley, who told him, “I can get you a job. I guarantee you two hundred million dollars in two years.”<sup>29</sup> Tierney was, by his own admission, “really messed up.”<sup>30</sup> He asked his wife whether he was being stupid. Her response was direct, even if extreme, to make the point: “Listen, if we need to live in a trailer, we’ll live in a trailer. We’ve got to do what’s right.”<sup>31</sup>

“It was messy,” Tierney said to me in retrospect. “I struggled. But eventually you come back to who you are as a human being, and you come back to that question: How do you define success?”<sup>32</sup>

For Tierney the idea that service was important had been planted early by his parents. His father had served in World War II. His mother had volunteered. “I am sure that one of the reasons that I was attracted to consulting is that it is a helping profession,” he said to me, reflecting on the impact of his parents. “And one of the reasons that I was attracted to general management was that it felt to me that my mission as an executive was to create an environment where other people could succeed.”<sup>33</sup> For Tierney, Bridgespan offered an opportunity to use his specific skills to serve a broader community.

The organization was formally launched in September 2000. Within nine months of its founding, Bridgespan raised \$7 million in financing, hired twenty-seven employees, and expanded to a West Coast office.<sup>34</sup> Jeff Bradach served as Bridgespan's CEO, overseeing day-to-day operations while Tierney served as its chairman. "It was clear to me that for Jeff to succeed as CEO, I could *not* be in his neighborhood," Tierney told me, explaining why he continued to work for two-plus years from his Bain office, two blocks away, while supporting Bridgespan's launch. "I could help with strategy, I could do fund-raising, and I could work with clients."<sup>35</sup>

The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation was Bridgespan's first client. For decades, the foundation had worked to improve the lives of people in low-income communities through grants to organizations that fought poverty, improved schools, and strengthened communities in the United States and the developing world. To ensure that its funding was making an impact, Bridgespan helped the foundation narrow the scope of its work and develop tools to measure the results of its grantees. Today, Bridgespan's clients include the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Salvation Army, the YMCA, and hundreds more. To help nonprofits that can't afford to pay for its services, Bridgespan also makes case studies of its work freely available. Indeed, a central tenet of its social mission is to generate and distribute useful knowledge throughout the social sector—through articles, books, an award-winning Web site, speeches, and conferences.

## Bringing It All Together

On a late January day in 2012, Tierney took the stage at the Georgia Tech School of Management as part of the school's Impact Speaker Series.<sup>36</sup> "Hi everybody," he greeted the audience, as he dropped his printed speech onto the lecturn—pages he wouldn't touch until



ten minutes into his talk. “My name’s Tom, and I want to be useful to you,” he said as he removed his jacket and hung it on a chair.

Tierney’s talk began with a subject that the student audience might not necessarily have been thinking about, as he admitted to them. “‘Philanthropy?’ you might say,” he said, scratching his head. “I don’t have any money. I have debts.” Then, without stopping, he launched into his stump speech about service and the role it’s played in his life, drawing the throughline from his childhood values to the choice he made to walk away from a million-dollar paycheck to work for free for a nonprofit.

Tierney’s story—and the lesson he wanted his listeners to take away—was that a fulfilling life does not consist of three separate serial phases in which you learn, then you earn, and then you serve. “The fact is,” he said in a 2008 interview, “you ought to be learning continuously. You earn, but you earn in different ways and different amounts.” He then added a rhetorical question: “Why does serving wait until you’re sixty-five or seventy?”<sup>37</sup>

Tierney is especially troubled by the idea of service as an afterthought—something you do after you retire. “That serving bit was just as important to me, and I wasn’t going to just leave it for the dessert at dinner. I wanted it as part of the main course,” he said.<sup>38</sup>

But he doesn’t merely want people to give their money away earlier; he wants them to give their money in a way that is smarter, that has more impact, and that, to use a term from the business world, gives donors a higher ROI (return on investment). Some philanthropists see giving as an end in itself, and they don’t focus on the results of their gifts, he said. But the nonprofit world also lacks what Tierney calls market feedback. “If you own a restaurant and put something on the menu, you’re going to know in short order whether your customers like it or not,” he said.<sup>39</sup> Philanthropy lacks such immediate, tangible feedback. As a result, Tierney says, it tends to underperform.

Tierney has been talking about these issues a lot lately, alongside Joel Fleishman, professor of law at Duke University, whom Tierney affectionately describes as his “Jewish godfather.” Fleishman helped fund Bridgespan when he was at Atlantic Philanthropies, and, more recently, the two coauthored a book called *Give Smart*. “We believe that all philanthropy is deeply personal,” they wrote. “By asking the right questions . . . you will be far more likely to achieve the change you want to bring about in the world.”<sup>40</sup>

Fleishman says Tierney has “an unbelievable knack” for conveying these lessons in simple language and commonsense analogies.<sup>41</sup> The notion that nonprofits should have as little overhead as possible still dominates the philanthropic world. In one of their joint speeches, Fleishman recalls, Tierney said, “It’s like deciding to fly on the airline with the least maintenance.” This made the concept easy to grasp.

In all of his talks, Tierney questions this conventional wisdom, arguing that there is bad overhead (say, paying for swank office space) and good overhead (such as investing in technology to track results). Tierney counsels philanthropists not to place restrictions on how their donation can be spent (Sheryl Sandberg, for one, heeded this sage advice). Tierney urges them to focus instead on results, asking grantees to agree to certain performance milestones.

“I hope that every philanthropist asks him- or herself, on a regular basis, ‘How can I double my impact with the time, money, and influence at my disposal?’” he once told a reporter. “If every philanthropist does that . . . and as a result, we boost the results achieved by philanthropy by ten percent, can you imagine?” He continued, “That’s like adding hundreds of billions of dollars of new philanthropy—smarter philanthropy—that achieves better results for our communities and our country. That would be a legacy to be proud of.”<sup>42</sup>

## The Skills Tom Tierney Exemplifies

Examining his life philosophy in his journal, Tierney once wrote, “Those that succeed build lives first and résumés second. When they stare in the mirror, they don’t see just a professional; they see a parent, a spouse, a friend, and a member of the community.”<sup>43</sup> Tierney knows that a leader plays many roles in life, and he seems to revel in the complex task of finding creative ways to make them work well together. He has traveled a winding path from inconsistent student to California bus driver, engineer in the Algerian desert to Harvard MBA, consultant to high-flying CEO, author to full-time charitable volunteer. He’s been a perpetual traveler, a devoted father, and a significant mentor to people who are great leaders in their own right.

All along his remarkable journey, Tierney’s deep-seated values, on which he regularly and critically reflects, guide him like a lodestar. The disciplined creativity he applies to his commitments large and small enables him to learn as he joyfully serves others, with stellar results. He has faced obstacles and made mistakes, fallen down and gotten up again. At every juncture, he has adopted the same approach, asking others and himself, “Am I getting better?”<sup>44</sup> Then he has taken the steps necessary to answer positively. He contributes his boundless energy and keen intellect to the people and things that matter to him by envisioning his legacy, weaving the domains of his life together coherently, and seeing new ways of doing things. Although Tierney is an exemplar of numerous other skills, let’s dig further into these three. Then, in Part II, I give you concrete suggestions for ways you can make them part of your repertoire.

### *Be Real: Envision Your Legacy*

Tom Tierney has a vision for where he is headed, what kind of legacy he wants to leave, and how to pursue what is most important in life. Tierney knows not only where he's been but also where he's going. He can paint a vivid picture of the life he wants to lead, visualizing himself in five, ten, and even twenty years. Not only does he have a compelling image of an achievable future, but also he has a sense of how to achieve that vision. Although he may not have all the details figured out, he understands the values that will guide him on the path to realizing his dreams.

A leader living the life he wants needs to form an optimistic and yet realistic picture of the world he wants to create. Tierney's dedication to journaling—and the practical knowledge that emerges from his rigorous self-examination—demonstrates how he goes about envisioning a future that makes sense to him, a future that is congruent with the person he wants to be and how he wants to be remembered.

Tierney's focus on his own evolution is displayed in the decisions he's made. For example, in 1990, during the crisis at Bain, he resolved to stay because he knew that his departure would be a devastating signal of indifference to the long-term interests of the firm. Some years later, after Bain found its footing and then some, at the peak of Tierney's powers as CEO, he chose to leave in the prime of his career and launch a small nonprofit start-up—not a standard move in the eyes of many in the elite world of top-tier consulting firms.

Why did he do it? The new venture allowed him to apply his mastery to help causes closer to his core values. And as Bridgespan spread its wings—as he multiplied his impact by enabling others to help those in need—Tierney saw yet greater opportunity to use his energy, talent, and networks. He dreamed of doing even greater good by reimagining the world of philanthropy. Today, by teaching wealthy people who want to help others the lessons he's learned from his own

experience about how to focus on and create a future that matters, his impact as a leader of positive social change ripples outward.

### *Be Whole: Weave Disparate Strands*

Tom Tierney weaves together the pieces of his life so that it has coherence. He views all the aspects of his life as interconnected and mutually enriching. He understands how different roles complement each other. He has a sense that all aspects of his life are integral parts of the person he is, and integral to his efforts.

Tierney's life illustrates ways to harness the different domains of life into a coherent whole. One example is his ongoing pursuit of opportunities to seek work that gives credence to his core value of producing social good. Another is the way he ensures that the most precious people in his life—his wife and children—are lodged deeply in his consciousness and receive his attention. And a third is the way he invests in developing the capacity of others to fit together the domains of *their* lives.

From volunteering for the United Way early in his career to serving on numerous nonprofit boards and founding Bridgespan, Tierney has sought the chance to serve society through his work. Throughout his professional life he has moved ever closer to achieving simultaneous four-way wins: actions that benefit work, home, community, and self, all at once. As a guest at the one-year anniversary celebration of the publication of *Give Smart*, I saw this play out as family, friends, colleagues, philanthropists, beneficiaries of charity, and others were all together in the same place to advance a common cause.

Interpersonal presence comes in two forms: physical and psychological. It's possible to be physically present with others while being psychologically absent. Of course, both forms of presence matter when it comes to demonstrating love and to making one's family a real and ongoing part of one's life. Tierney realized early,

through hard lessons, that he had to be vigilant about protecting the time for his family, so he committed to being physically absent from his office on weekends. With few exceptions, he found ways to ensure that he was home and that, after hours, work matters were secondary to his family's activities, from sports to Boy Scouts. Indeed, he shepherded both of his sons to Eagle Scout, the highest rank. And even when yet another red-eye flight wouldn't get him home, or when he determined that he just had to travel, he stayed in touch and maintained a psychological presence through messages that let Karen, Colin, and Braden know that he was thinking of them.

And Tierney hasn't just taken up the task of weaving his own domains together; he's helped others do the same. He knows, from a business perspective, that it's not a good idea to burn people out. Finding John Donahoe a local client so that he wouldn't have to travel is a good example of a creative solution Tierney found to a dilemma faced by one of his key people. He also devotes time to teaching MBA students the lessons of his own experience, guiding them to integrate the pieces in ways that work for them. Recently, he's been honored to serve in the Class of 1951 Chair for the Study of Leadership at West Point, where he teaches seminars on life and leadership. For leaders living the lives they want, it's all of piece.

### *Be Innovative: See New Ways of Doing Things*

Tom Tierney is willing to question old habits and to innovate in managing life's demands. He does not allow long-standing routines to dictate how he lives his life. He is willing to explore opportunities for greater performance in, and cohesiveness between, the different aspects of his life. He is willing to question his behaviors and to experiment with solutions for managing day-to-day as well as long-term needs.

Tierney shows how to try new things to get closer to your aspirations. He says that predetermined tracks are bunk and that you've got to chop through the weeds to make your own path. Tierney is an avid learner and a true student of his own life. He continually feeds his curiosity by observing people and the world around him.

This openness, coupled with a fearless quest for knowledge about himself, was certainly there when he landed in northern Africa on a quickly conceived adventure and then entered an even stranger country at Harvard Business School. Tierney's openness to change blossomed later, when he learned how to look the part of a business professional, then how to be a partner, and then how to be a very effective executive. He learned from negative feedback. After Meg Whitman told him he was a steamroller, he drew a picture of a steamroller on his calendar every day and, at the end of each day, crossed off the picture if he had not steamrolled anyone that day.<sup>45</sup>

And now, in the world of philanthropy, he continues to scour the world for best practices and has created a video interview series that shares them.<sup>46</sup> He rejected the traditional assumption of trade-offs implied by the "learn-earn-serve" model of personal development and has shown how it's good for you to *always* be learning, earning, and serving, even if in different measures along the way. By persistently rejecting traditional ways of doing things, Tierney has demonstrated what being innovative truly means.

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When I asked people who know Tom Tierney well to describe him, the word I heard most often was *disciplined*. He has dedicated serious attention to asking himself, "How do I define real success in my life?" After he answers this question, he acts on what he says. Perhaps this is why in the world of philanthropy he finds himself, once again, to be the beating heart of an enterprise devoted to using available resources to make things better for others.

With his penchant for tracking almost everything he cares about, Tierney knows exactly where he stands in pursuit of his most critical goals. He reflects on his failures and his successes and then looks at the day ahead, and the next day, and the next week, and the next month, and the next year, to see whether he's on target. Then he adjusts accordingly, even if it means walking away from positions with great power and income.

Tierney, whose father taught him to believe in the little guy, preaches the ideology that employees are people first, with lives that matter. And he applies that to his own life, putting his family first. This commitment to his life beyond work didn't detract from his career success; to the contrary, it fortified his capacity as a business executive and inspired others, animating his achievements at work and in society. The four domains of his life all win.

I refer to Tierney as a visionary consultant. But a more apt appellation might be something like great student, because his avid thirst for useful knowledge has made it possible for him to evolve, to continually become the person he wants to become, while never forgetting his purpose: to serve, something all of us are capable of doing better.