

Parents Who **LEAD**



The
**Leadership Approach
You Need to
Parent with Purpose,
Fuel Your Career,
and
Create a Richer Life**

STEWART D. FRIEDMAN

Author of the bestselling Total Leadership

ALYSSA F. WESTRING

HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW PRESS

Praise from Thought Leaders for *Parents Who Lead*

“The intersection of working and becoming a parent can be daunting. Although what life-changing event is more magical than being a parent? In *Parents Who Lead*, Friedman and Westring offer wonderful stories, wisdom, and actionable advice about applying leadership principles at home. An inspiring read for working parents.”

—**ARON AIN**, CEO, Kronos; author, *WorkInspired*

“I’ve been a champion of Total Leadership for over a decade, and its principles have been instrumental in my continued career success. *Parents Who Lead* applies these principles to the absolute toughest job—being a productive parent and role model—and it does not disappoint! Read this book, put it to practice, and see the results.”

—**SAMUEL ALLEN**, SVP and COO, Marketing, Salesforce

“*Parents Who Lead* contains precious new knowledge for working parents. It’s an engaging, science-based, essential guide to upgrading your life, financially supporting your family, and being a stellar parent. Friedman and Westring share an easy-to-follow, proven method to reduce your stress, succeed at work, and inspire your children to live healthy, meaningful lives.”

—**DAVE ASPREY**, founder and CEO, Bulletproof; *New York Times* bestselling author, *Super Human*

“*Parents Who Lead* helps us prioritize, strategize, and take conscious action so we can lead more well-rounded, successful lives. Friedman and Westring share advice that is at once practical and inspirational. They are going to help a LOT of parents!”

—**SCOTT BEHSON**, Professor of Management, Fairleigh Dickinson University; author, *The Working Dad’s Survival Guide*

“As a parent, a son, and a co-CEO, my main priority is to be present for—and create impact across—all the important relationships in my life. I know I share that goal with others living in a fast-paced digital world. *Parents Who Lead* makes that goal feel not only attainable but realistic.”

—**NEIL BLUMENTHAL**, cofounder and co-CEO, Warby Parker

“*Parents Who Lead* encourages working mothers and fathers to take a crucial step back from their challenging day-to-day responsibilities to home in on the values that can transform their families. The enjoyable exercises are worth the time, as they can lead to more fulfilling relationships and careers and to happier children with brighter futures.”

—**MEREDITH BODGAS**, Editor in Chief, *Working Mother*

“Every parent is a leader. Every parent experiences the challenge of having too much to do in precious and finite time. *Parents Who Lead* articulates a sustainable, manageable path forward through this often stress-inducing gauntlet to help us toward the realization of a well-lived and well-shared life.”

—**SAM CALAGIONE**, founder and Brewer, Dogfish Head

“Parenting is the only 24/7 job that is legally allowed, and it’s the most important job we ever do. Yet there is no training for it. *Parents Who Lead* is the ultimate guide that fills this void. A must-read for any parent!”

—**ZARJA CIBEJ**, CEO, myTamarin

“At last, an inspiring and informative book on one of the most challenging leadership issues of our time—parenting. *Parents Who Lead* is full of lessons on how to handle demands on your time and resources—at work, at home, and in relationships—while raising the next generation. Want to put everything in context and feel positive? Read this!”

—**MICHAEL DOWLING**, President and CEO, Northwell Health

“Parents Who Lead is a systematic, practical, and inspiring guide for parents who want to succeed in their careers and make the world better for their children. It’s a crucial resource for organizations committed to attracting and retaining the best people who also happen to be parents.”

—**ANNE ERNI**, Chief People Officer, Audible

“Parents Who Lead provides data-driven tools and pragmatic direction to those of us choosing to be exceptional leaders, both inside and outside our homes. This book is a must-read if you are a busy executive who wants to attain the highest possible ROI on the greatest investment of your life: your children.”

—**JENNA FISHER**, Managing Director, Russell Reynolds Associates

“With Parents Who Lead, Friedman and Westring inspired me to go deeper with my wife, my children, and my community. If you’re looking to strengthen the bonds with the people who matter most in your life, I highly recommend reading this book. It is well researched and heartwarming.”

—**GREG FITZSIMMONS**, comedian and author

“Stew was one of my favorite Wharton professors, and his lessons have resonated with me as my wife and I raised our three boys and I built my health and wellness company into a five-hundred-person operation. This well-written, compelling book distills evidence-based wisdom into actionable, outcome-focused tasks destined to improve not just the parenting, but the lives of all who read it.”

—**SHAUN FRANCIS**, Chair and CEO, Medcan; author,
Eat, Move, Think

“Stew Friedman and Alyssa Westring have applied their thoughtful, reflective, experiential approach to help us lead the lives we want in our families, careers, communities, and in staying healthy. If your life

feels out of sync with what you want—and whose doesn't—this gift of a book is for you!"

—**ELLEN GALINSKY**, President, Families and Work Institute;
author, *Mind in the Making*

"*Parents Who Lead* provides a formula for helping parents bring the principles of success from the workplace into their families, where leadership skills are often needed most. It's a wonderful blueprint for integrating work and the rest of life, a hallmark for defining success that sets the example for future generations."

—**ROBERT GLAZER**, CEO, Acceleration Partners; bestselling author,
Elevate and *Performance Partnerships*

"The skills that define great leaders at work are surprisingly relevant to becoming a great parent at home. This book won't just help you identify those skills—it's a step-by-step guide for putting them into practice."

—**ADAM GRANT**, *New York Times* bestselling author, *Originals* and
Give and Take

"In *Parents Who Lead*, Friedman and Westring bring together concepts too often separated—work and family, leadership and parenting—to the detriment of all. They integrate research with practical tools to help readers learn many enriching ways to improve their lives by focusing on the whole—their lives, careers, families, and communities."

—**BRAD HARRINGTON**, Executive Director, Boston College Center for
Work and Family

"If struggling to meet work, family, and social demands means you feel too busy to read this book, then you *really* need to read it! It will help you unlock creative steps to live a more grounded, spacious, and fulfilling life. *Parents Who Lead* is a resource to draw on as your family and your career evolve."

—**GRACE HO**, Regional Lead, Women's Recruiting and Development
(Asia), McKinsey & Company

“Working parents often feel doomed to do neither work nor parenting well. Friedman and Westring harness their experience as both leadership educators and parents to provide fresh insights for overcoming this common quandary. Read this book and learn how to lead your way into a new, more fulfilling, and successful way of parenting.”

—**HERMINIA IBARRA**, Charles Handy Professor of Organizational Behavior, London Business School

“People increasingly feel that there’s no point in succeeding at work only to fail at home. But what if they apply proven organizational leadership tools to their families? *Parents Who Lead* is a lively self-help book with a creative twist.”

—**ROSABETH MOSS KANTER**, Harvard Business School Professor; author, *Think Outside the Building*

“Most leadership guides ignore the fact that many professionals are parents. *Parents Who Lead* provides a refreshing perspective on leadership, with practical tools for building a purpose-driven, rewarding life that embraces career and family. This book will help children, families, and working parents thrive!”

—**MOLLY KENNEDY**, Director, Dove Masterbrand US Engagement, Unilever

“Whether you’re a new parent, or entering a different phase of your children’s lives, or a grandparent, this book is for you. Stew Friedman has expanded his award-winning Total Leadership principles into a manifesto that is a game changer for the parenting and leadership literature.”

—**STEPHEN K. KLASKO**, President and CEO, Thomas Jefferson University and Jefferson Health

“What a cool book! It spoke to me in so many ways. I needed this wisdom now, even after twenty-seven years of marriage and twenty-five years as an executive and mother of three. *Parents Who Lead* is a

tremendous resource to refresh and increase the quality of our lives as partners, parents, and professionals.”

—**LAURA KOHLER**, Senior Vice President, Human Resources,
Stewardship, and Sustainability, Kohler, Co.

“*Parents Who Lead* offers useful exercises and concepts to help parents reflect and learn as a team how to create parenting partnerships and a collective vision for a better life. Readers will gain a new understanding of how to proactively align and enhance their parenting strategies.”

—**ELLEN ERNST KOSSEK**, Basil S. Turner Professor of Management,
Purdue University; former President, Work and Family Researchers
Network

“Friedman and Westring masterfully translate social science evidence into practical steps for building the leadership capacity to cultivate our relationships with our children and with all those important to their development. The compelling examples will inspire parents of all ages to develop more meaningful lives, lived together.”

—**SUSAN J. LAMBERT**, President, Work and Family Researchers
Network; Associate Professor, University of Chicago

“It’s fantastic to see a book that provides actionable, sensible, well-researched advice for both mothers and fathers. By focusing on parenting as a leadership challenge, *Parents Who Lead* empowers readers with a new way to make decisions that are best for their families and for themselves.”

—**JOSH LEVS**, author, *All In*

“Stew Friedman does it again! Drawing on his groundbreaking *Total Leadership*, his evidence-based research reminds working parents and those who employ them that sustainable success means bringing your whole self to work. *Parents Who Lead* is brilliantly done—

a must-read guide that offers real solutions for working parents who strive to be values-driven leaders in today's fast-paced world."

—**DAVE LISSY**, Executive Chairman, Bright Horizons

"I have given Stew Friedman's books to hundreds of people. They are that good—best in category by a country mile! *Parents Who Lead*, with Alyssa Westring, draws on his entire lifetime of work. I only wish he had written it when I was just starting out as a parent."

—**F. WILLIAM MCNABB III**, former CEO, Vanguard

"I love this book! It's engaging, inspirational, and relatable. As the mother of a teenage daughter and the spouse of a physician husband, I identified with the parents in the book and was engrossed in their stories. *Parents Who Lead* is a great, timely resource for working parents and a landmark contribution to organizations seeking to embrace the whole lives of their employees."

—**JENNIFER H. MIERES, MD**, Senior Vice President, Center for Equity of Care and Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, Northwell Health

"Being a CEO is tough job, but it's not nearly as demanding as being a mom or a dad. Thank goodness, then, that Stew Friedman and Alyssa Westring have brought their knowledge of leadership to the challenge of parenting. *Parents Who Lead* will stir you to rethink your assumptions about yourself, your partner, and your kids—and map a more fulfilling future for your lives together. If you feel overwhelmed by the demands of work, family, and the rest of life, take back control with this insightful and compassionate book."

—**DANIEL H. PINK**, author, *When* and *Drive*

"In *Parents Who Lead*, Stew Friedman, who has been enlightening the Fatherly community since our inception, and Alyssa Westring have created a playbook for how leadership principles translate to hearth and home. It has already empowered me with tools for better

communicating what I want for myself and from the relationships in my life.”

—**MICHAEL ROTHMAN**, CEO, Fatherly

“It’s hard to maintain a true parenting partnership, especially with a shared commitment to carry the mental and emotional load of leading your family together. Friedman and Westring provide a step-by-step plan for engaging your partner, children, colleagues, and community in building your family’s life by design rather than by inertia.”

—**MATT SCHNEIDER**, cofounder, City Dads Group

“I can think of no better guide than *Parents Who Lead* to help overwhelmed parents find time for what matters most. It’s filled with compelling stories, evidence-based research, advice gleaned from the best of leadership science, and engaging, fun, and practical interactive tools. It’s going to be so helpful to so many people.”

—**BRIGID SCHULTE**, award-winning journalist; Director, Better Life Lab; author, *Overwhelmed*

“What a marvelous book! I wish I’d had it when I was a young parent, but it’s equally valuable at the empty-nesting stage. The application of the Total Leadership approach to parenting is a wonderful reminder of how we can grow and lead in every area of our lives.”

—**ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER**, CEO, New America

“*Parents Who Lead* is great! It offers a thoughtful approach to parenting, with tips for enriching and nurturing the most important relationships we have. This book is a must-read for every parent who seeks to transform not only their relationship with their children but their relationship with the world.”

—**JULIE SMOLYANSKY**, CEO, Lifeway Foods

“*Parents Who Lead* is relentlessly engaging and useful for anyone who has children—or is considering becoming a parent. You, dear reader,

won't think about either parenthood or leadership in quite the same way after your journey through Friedman and Westring's compelling blend of stories, advice, and practical exercises."

—**ROBERT SUTTON**, Organizational psychologist and Stanford professor; bestselling author, *Scaling Up Excellence*, *The No Asshole Rule*, and *Good Boss, Bad Boss*

"When you're both a mom and a leader, it can be confounding to have to manage a leadership dance. Finally, a book that treats parents like the leaders we are! *Parents Who Lead* provides real, not squishy, teachings and treats parents—especially moms, but dads too—with the respect we all deserve."

—**GENEVIEVE THIERS**, founder, Sittercity; Producer, *RUN the Series*

"I'm buying this book for my team and my clients. *Parents Who Lead* is a winning playbook for raising healthy children while pursuing our professional lives—and enjoying our lives in the process! It debunks the myth of "work/life balance" and shows us how to reimagine work and family as a mutual win."

—**SALLY THORNTON**, founder and CEO, Forshay

"Your children need you to read this profoundly useful book. Its practical insights will help you confront essential questions, make better everyday choices and learn how to lead a more enriched way of living—for you and your family. It's required reading for parents striving to earn an A+ in life."

—**TOM TIERNEY**, former Worldwide Managing Partner, Bain & Company; Chairman and cofounder, Bridgespan Group

"How do you manage a cross-country move and a new job while striving to be a great husband and dad for your two young children? Read this book to learn how to focus on *what* really matters with *who* really matters so you can lead with values at work and at home."

—**JASON TOFF**, Director of Product Management, Facebook

“Parents, whether they realize it or not, are leaders. Like the best leaders, they can unite people around a shared vision to achieve more than anyone can achieve alone. In this practical and encouraging book, Friedman and Westring guide parents toward creating a better life for their families and everyone around them.”

—**LAURA VANDERKAM**, author, *Off the Clock* and *Juliet’s School of Possibilities*

Praise from *Parents Who Lead* Workshop Participants

“Designed for busy working parents in an ‘always on’ digital world, this book is an engaging read filled with proven strategies, actionable advice, enlightening research, and real-life examples—including ours—from the life-transforming workshop we did with Stew and Alyssa. A must-read for career-driven leaders who want to be winning moms and dads.”

—**DANIEL A. CHEN**, Head of Business Development, Quicken

—**LORETTA CHEN**, Corporate Controller, Paine Schwartz Partners

“The *Parents Who Lead* workshop provides a mind-opening, novel, and refreshing approach to leadership by upending the traditional notion of ‘balance’ and competing priorities. By following the steps, we learned how a single smart action can result in wins intertwining across all facets of our lives.”

—**WES CHOU AND LISA CHUNG**, technology executives

“The *Parents Who Lead* program has been truly transformational. We were skeptical that we’d be able to make changes that would stick. But the concepts and structure came to life and yielded quick results, en-

couraging us to keep going to make meaningful, sustainable changes in our lives, with our children, and in our community.”

—**DANA NAE GARCIA**, Executive, Vynamic

—**JAIME GARCIA**, Director, FS Investments

“We highly recommend the *Parents Who Lead* workshop! It helps you reflect on your core values and goals as a parent, and it’s full of pragmatic ideas toward purposeful parenting. As we have practiced and incorporated these techniques into our lives together, we have become extremely close as a family.”

—**ANJANA HARVE**, Chief Information Officer, Hillrom

—**ROHIT HARVE**, Pharma Life Sciences Operations Strategy Leader,
Strategy&

“The *Parents Who Lead* workshop helped us bring the best parts of our professional lives—research, planning, structured communication, and experimentation—into our life at home. We had often drawn a line between who we are in our offices versus who we are in our personal lives. We acquired a tool set for breaking through those self-imposed barriers.”

—**BLAINE MCLAUGHLIN**, FinTech executive

—**ANN THOMSON**, IT Operations executive

“We started the *Parents Who Lead* program during our busiest period as parents of two. It wasn’t easy to find the time, but the immediate positive changes we saw urged us on. Now, with three children, busier than ever, we have the tools and confidence to stay the course toward achieving our vision for ourselves and our children.”

—**LAURA D. RIVERA**, Global Finance Director, Johnson & Johnson

—**HON. MARC A. ALFARANO**, Magisterial District Judge

“This workshop provided us with specific strategies and a new vocabulary to parent with purpose, and to do so in a way that simultane-

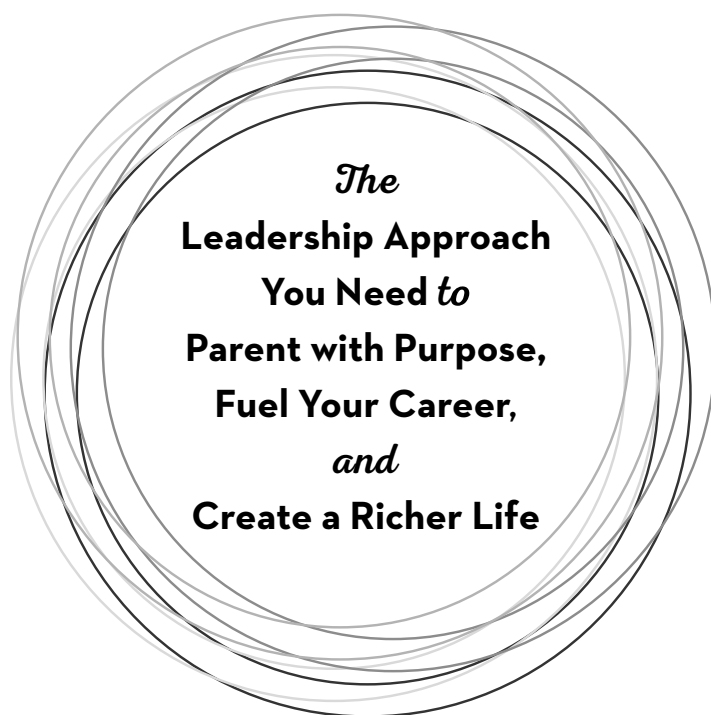
ously enhanced our marriage, careers, and community relationships. It doesn't happen overnight, but we are living proof that *Parents Who Lead* can help you uncover solutions to some of parenting's truly daunting challenges."

—**LAUREN TANZER**, Cardiology Administrator, Children's Hospital of Pennsylvania

—**MATTHEW TANZER**, Managing Director, Bayada Strategic Ventures

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For our children
and their children and their children and their children . . .
May your songs always be sung.

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Preface

WHY WE WROTE THIS BOOK

We wrote this book to bring the science of leadership to the art of parenting. We want to help you lift your head up and out of the chaos and craft a way—together, with your family—to build something different, something that serves your career, your life as a parent, and your other aspirations in life. As researchers, educators, consultants, and coaches, we have decades of experience helping people learn how to succeed as they aim to have a positive impact in their work, in their communities, and at home—as leaders in all aspects of life. We know it can be better, and you can make it so.

In striving to be the parent you want to be, have a fruitful career, find time to nurture important relationships, engage as a citizen, and make sure you stay healthy and sane (and we know that doing all this is *very* difficult), you are not alone. Yet many parents worry that they're among the unfortunate few who haven't figured it all out. Through their work with us, they're happily surprised—relieved, really—to find that nearly *everyone* is struggling, albeit in their own distinct ways.

We've seen parents find greater harmony as well as better performance in all parts of their lives by viewing things in a new way. Observing how other parents wrestle with the demands of modern life,

and how they apply our proven principles and tools, gives people both greater confidence and the resources to pursue the lives they want to lead. We expect this is what you're trying to do—forge a life that's fulfilling, creative, and meaningful for you, your family, your work, and your community. To make our research-based model available to you, so you can use it to make your world better, is our *raison d'être*. But there's a bit more to the story of why we produced this new leadership approach designed just for parents.

From Stew: After getting my PhD in organizational psychology from the University of Michigan, my early career as a management professor at the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania was focused on understanding what makes effective leaders. After having my first child (over thirty years ago), however, I pivoted, as I viscerally realized something I had learned as a student from seminal scholars in my field: people don't just shelve the other parts of their lives when they are at work. I started talking about this with anyone who would listen.¹

The idea of accounting for the whole person at work wasn't mainstream, either in business schools or in business culture, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when much of the focus in the emerging field of work and life was, appropriately, devoted to women being supported in their quest to work outside the home in their chosen profession and be treated as equals to men at work. I became one of the accidental spokesmen in a new conversation about work and life (*italics added* because, at the time, I was one of the few men interested in this topic). It's gratifying to see that there's been progress since those days. Yet it is undeniable that we still have a *long* way to go.² So I have continued to pursue practical knowledge for how to create harmony among the different parts of life in my research, teaching, consulting, and advocacy.

My students at the Wharton School, especially those in our executive MBA program, where I have been teaching the course that gave rise to this book for over fifteen years, have been clamoring for me to

produce a guide for parents. So, this book is, in part, a response to their interest. But my motivation for working on this book stems even more profoundly from my family. My life partner, Hallie, and I have three children, now in their twenties and thirties. When I turned sixty-five a few years back, the only gift I asked for from these four precious people was this: write to me about what you'd like me to focus on in my remaining years and how, by my doing so, your life would be enriched . . . and be willing to talk this over for an hour, one-on-one. (Yes, the professor gave his family an assignment.) Among other things, they told me, each in their own way, how my research on parents applying leadership principles might help our family and be of some value to society. I came away from these conversations further inspired to write this book, for them and for you. But I needed a research partner and friend whose experience as a working mother (from a generation after mine) and knowledge as an accomplished scholar could inform what I might be able to say on my own.

From Alyssa: By the time I graduated from college, I knew I wanted to dedicate my career to the science and psychology of helping people thrive in both their careers and personal lives. It is no coincidence I was passionate about this topic, considering I was already starting to fret about navigating my future career and raising my hypothetical children (this was more than a decade before I actually had them). While pursuing my PhD in organizational psychology at Michigan State University, my academic research was flourishing, but I longed to make an impact on people's lives. I searched for scholars doing this work on the front lines.

Stew's work was evidence-based and practical. I emailed him and asked if we could work together. In the thirteen years since, Stew has become a mentor and I have become director of research for our company, Total Leadership. My role is to determine what's working and what's not as we continually improve our model, which helps individuals and

organizations create sustainable change that increases performance in all parts of life by finding greater harmony among them. As I became a tenured professor of management and entrepreneurship at DePaul University, we've continued to collaborate, culminating in this book. I've found a career path that allows me to bridge the gap between academic research and people's daily experience. I couldn't be happier about it.

At thirty-nine, I am a youngish working mom with two youngish kids, ages eight and ten. In fact, *Time* magazine interviewed me as a "millennial mom" for its cover story, "Help, My Parents Are Millennials." While I might not consider myself a millennial, I do feel connected with the challenges of being a working parent today. From learning that my mom was diagnosed with brain cancer just a week before starting my tenure-track job to my husband's unexpected stint as a stay-at-home dad, I've ridden the roller coaster of working parenthood and have amassed my own trove of epiphanies and embarrassing stories. I've been there. Rather, I am there. In fact, in one of the video interviews we did as part of our research for this book, my husband is chasing my naked daughter around our living room behind me while I try to remain focused. While there's no one right way, Stew and I can help you find what works for you and your family based on our own research, the scholarship in our field, and our experience working with clients and students, from undergraduates to executive MBAs.

For the benefit of the world of today as well as the world of tomorrow, your children's world, you need to lead. We invite you to join us, to read on as we provide you with the tools we've developed so that you can achieve greater connection, engagement, and success—as *you* define it—in the modern world of 24/7 demands, the digital deluge, revolutionized gender roles, political tensions, and the increasing fragility of human existence on earth.³

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Chapter 1

THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE OF YOUR LIFE

Deena Altman and Jake Center met as fifteen-year-olds in summer camp, although they didn't start dating until their midtwenties, when they were living in New York City. After three years, they got married and now have two energetic boys, Ian, seven, and Casey, four. Jake is a practicing attorney in Charleston, South Carolina. He recently began studying Transcendental Meditation, but this doesn't eliminate the stress he feels as he tries to keep up at work and be present for his family. After college, Deena started a career in marketing, but she recently switched to nonprofit management, seeking work that felt more personally meaningful. Deena was one week into a busy new job as executive director of a nonprofit foundation and Jake was chugging steadily toward becoming a partner at his firm when we began our work with them.

On the surface, the big-picture stuff seemed to be going well. They both cared about their careers and about their relationships with each other and their children. As we got to know them, they confessed that

they were constantly rushing, always playing catch-up, barely staying on top of their workloads, and struggling to squeeze enjoyment from their side-by-side lives. Jake put it this way: “When things are stressful at work, I feel even more overwhelmed at home. I can be short-tempered with Deena and the boys. I’ll snap at them. I regret this. I don’t like that work takes so much of my attention, but I don’t see any way around it.”

Deena faces daunting challenges, too, if a bit different: “Work distracts me at home and even when I’m in the car with Jake or with the kids—largely because of email, texts, and constant chirps from my stupid phone. I feel guilty that I’m not present enough for family, that I’m not a good mom, and that I need to pay more attention to my marriage. Even though I know better, I just can’t seem to stop myself from jumping in when the latest crisis at work hits. I often feel disconnected from the very people I most want to feel connected to.”

Sensing that their lives weren’t what they wanted them to be, they agreed, though not without some trepidation, to participate in our workshop designed expressly for parents, based on the program described in Stew’s book, *Total Leadership: Be a Better Leader, Have a Richer Life*. (See the box “Total Leadership and the Pursuit of Four-Way Wins.”) Most of the people who join our workshops (some of whose stories are in this book—although names and other identifying information have been changed for privacy) have a similar sense of their lives barreling along, but that they’re not in the driver’s seat.

We were not surprised to find how many people in parenting partnerships feel as Deena and Jake do. (By parenting partnerships, we mean relationships of shared responsibility for raising children, which often means married couples, though not always.) Many people feel alone in their strife. They want things to be different, but they are mired in ways of thinking and acting that are no longer working and, as important, they don’t believe there’s a better way. They are not sure where to turn for advice on how to gain a greater sense of control and to create meaningful change.

You probably picked up this book because you too are feeling that you are not leading the life you really want as a parent. Perhaps you're just plain tired: tired of trying to coordinate busy work schedules with your parenting partner; tired of waiting for things to settle down; tired of feeling as if you aren't being your best self at work, in your most intimate relationships, and with your community of friends and extended family. And probably tired because you don't sleep enough. You are not alone. As parents, we've been there, too, and we've worked with people like you who have been there. Here are some of the things we hear from parents when we start working with them:

- I'm letting people down. My kids, coworkers, partner, and friends deserve better.
- There's not enough time for me to be the kind of parent I want to be.
- If I could just get my act together, I could have it all.
- I need to completely overhaul my life to make things work.
- I don't have control of my situation, so I can't really change the way things are.
- Other people don't understand what I'm going through. I'm really on my own.
- People are too busy to help me, and I don't want to bother them.
- My partner and I can't find much common ground on parenting.
- I'm not a leader.

If you're holding any of these assumptions, either consciously or not, you're bound to be undermining your own success. But our evidence shows that you can change your thinking and, by adopting leadership principles and tools, challenge assumptions, see your life in a new

Total Leadership and the Pursuit of Four-Way Wins

In the 2008 book *Total Leadership*, Stew introduced the idea of the “four-way win”—a new way of looking at the connections among the different parts of life and then taking action to improve performance at work, at home, in the community, and for yourself personally (mind, body, and spirit). This reframes the idea of “work/life balance,” which implies sacrifice in one part for success in another.

It doesn't always have to be a zero-sum game.¹ Instead, the Total Leadership approach focuses on creating harmony, or integration, among all the aspects of our lives, which can be achieved by being real (acting with authenticity by clarifying what's important), being whole (acting with integrity by respecting the whole person), and being innovative (acting with creativity by continually experimenting with how things get done).

Evidence from studies of parents who have used this approach found that they significantly increase their satisfaction with their careers by 17 percent, with their family lives by 31 percent, with their community engagement by 39 percent, and with their personal well-being by 54 percent. Moreover, they report a 23 percent improvement in both their physical and mental health as well as a 31 percent reduction in stress.

If you've read *Total Leadership*, you might recognize some of the basic principles in the pages that follow, but they're applied in a new way here. If you're not familiar with *Total Leadership*, don't worry. We'll supply the fundamentals, redesigned to help parents meet the leadership challenges they face. In this book, we will show you, as a parent, how to take the four-way view of your world, systematically observing your life as a whole rather than as an endless series of trade-offs. You'll form a new appreciation for how no one part exists in isolation, so you can make better decisions about how to invest your most precious asset—that is, your attention. You'll get smarter about how to manage boundaries between, for example, work and family.

Taking the four-way view will give you fresh insights about how work, family, community, and your private self all affect each other, in your life and in your partner's, too. You'll then generate practical, exciting ideas for your family to pursue four-way wins—customized by you to fit sustainably in your world.

Like *Total Leadership*, this book is not about survival tactics or life hacks but is instead a proven guide for building lives of significance, with the emphasis here on what it means to do so if you're a parent. The method we describe and illustrate gets results because there is no one best way, no “one size fits all,” no fixed prescription. What *is* required is to consciously choose what matters, connect with who matters, and create innovative ways to make things better.

way, and find greater harmony and better performance in all aspects of your life.

Drawing on the scientific literature in psychology, sociology, and leadership studies, we've developed a leadership approach that is specifically designed for parenting partnerships in which the members have careers, whether or not both are currently employed outside the home.

We have found that developing as a leader has much in common with growing as a parent. The process of creative change starts with you. It just might be that the way you think about parenting and its place in your life is holding you back. Through the activities we lay out here, some of which you will undertake alone and some together with your partner in parenting, you'll come to see that your assumptions about what it takes to perform well in all your life's roles, especially as a parent, might be misguided. Through discovery, dialogue, and design of new ideas, we'll guide you to systematically take actions that will enable you to test these assumptions and, if you become aware of how they're causing unnecessary frustration or even failure, to alter them.

While we can't make everything easy, perfect, and without some sacrifice, we'll show you how to explore the values that unite you, the passions that drive you, and the vision you hold collectively for the future—for your children. We'll provide you with tools you can use to define success on your own terms, connect more meaningfully with people in your life, and try innovative ways to nurture your career, your family (however you define it), your community, and your personal well-being.

Parent with Purpose, Fuel Your Career, and Create a Richer Life

It might not seem obvious at first, but raising children is a leadership challenge, perhaps the most important one you'll ever face. Being a

parent requires seemingly endless amounts of energy and patience, illuminates our shortcomings, and mystifies us at every turn. As we try to lead our children toward happy, compassionate, and confident lives, we must figure out how to do so while at the same time investing in what matters most to us elsewhere in life.

At some point on the journey with us, most of the parents in our workshops feel a jolt; the realization that as parents they *are* indeed leaders, capable of mobilizing others toward a goal that matters, and that growing as a leader isn't just about work—it's about life.² Whether or not they are in an official leadership role at work, they realize they have the capacity to inspire. Rather than seeing themselves as mere administrators of their lives, reactively overseeing to-do lists, they start to view themselves as leaders who are consciously designing an achievable future—the one they truly want—and showing the people around them how to make that feast a reality they can savor together.

Our goals are to educate and to provoke, to push you to think of yourself as a leader and act like one, but not in the traditional sense of having formal authority, or of being in charge of people in an organizational hierarchy or political setting. Leaders are those who see how to improve things and inspire people to pursue a better future together.

Let's now take a more detailed look at the leadership approach we'll explore in this book. In the chapters that follow, we'll describe the actions you can take, on your own and then together as a partnership. (Most people find it takes a few months to methodically work through the book's activities, in light of the other responsibilities in their lives.) You'll articulate what really matters, build trust and strengthen relationships with your most important people, and develop creative ways to be more of who you want to be.³ We'll explain what we want you to do and why. Along the way, we'll dive into the stories of some of the parenting partnerships, people like Deena Altman and Jake Center, who have teamed up with us to increase their dexterity in working together to parent with purpose and find greater harmony. We expect you'll see some of your own experience reflected in these stories, and this will

help you compose your own stories about the adventures you have in learning to live in closer accord with your values.

Envision Your Future Together

A leader has a vision of a future that's better than today. To get excited about changing in meaningful ways, you need to be able to vividly picture what you want your life to look like. You might find it easy to do that, though not everyone does. And when your life is intertwined with others, the challenge is greater, as it becomes envisioning a future that you, your partner, *and* your children want. This vision should allow each of you the flexibility to pursue your individual passions and fulfill your most important values, while uniting you in shared dreams.

You'll come together to create what we call a "collective vision," to align and start to see new interconnections between one another and among various domains of your lives. We'll guide you through the inevitable challenges that arise when you realize that your dreams and your partner's may not be entirely in sync, and we'll help you learn how to get to common ground. We'll advise you on defining the path you want to walk together and on seeing how, in your everyday life on that path, you serve as a role model for the next generation. No two visions are alike. We'll not presume to prescribe what yours should be; rather, we'll help you see the power of crafting yours *together* and using it as a guide, starting now.

Embrace the Four-Way View

To move toward your vision together, you need to take an honest look at how things are now. In order to do so, you'll take the four-way view and notice how the different parts of your life are interconnected. Taking stock of how happy you are and how well you're performing in the different aspects of your life serves as a powerful and practical motivator—it moves you to make changes and not just mindlessly maintain

the status quo.⁴ But not only do you need to reflect on your own life, you need to candidly communicate at least some of this information with your partner, children, and other important people. Even our friends and family members don't always grasp how we're feeling about the different parts of our lives, and how important these arenas are to us.

Revealing a full picture of our lives sometimes means getting honest about the darker side of parenting—like guilt, fear, or the disappointing fact that sometimes parenting isn't quite the fulfilling endeavor we were told it should be. But effective leaders don't hide from reality because it's uncomfortable or inconvenient. You will gain the self-awareness you need to understand yourself in new ways and so communicate more genuinely and compassionately, for your own benefit and that of your key relationships.

Engage Your Children

We expect you will be surprised to learn just how much, and what, your children have to say about your lives together.⁵ We'll help you begin age-appropriate dialogues about the values essential to your family and the vision of your future together. You'll uncover some of the crucial messages you are implicitly and explicitly sending to your children, some of which you may want to revise. And you'll enrich the quality of your connection with your children by drawing them closer.

Beyond that, you'll get to hear their creative, often dumbfounding, and sometimes downright hilarious suggestions about what you might try together as a family. One single father in our research, Dominic Martin, discovered that his four-year-old son, Leo, desperately wanted Dominic to teach him how to do new things. When Dominic inquired further, it turned out that Leo specifically wanted to learn how to vacuum! Not only were they able to identify a shared value (learning new things together), but Dominic got some newfound help with household chores, freeing up a bit of time for other things. You may be surprised to learn that your children don't necessarily need or want you to spend

a lot more time with them. Rather, they may want you to put away your phone and your to-do list and just be present, both physically *and* psychologically. Doable but head-turning ideas can emerge when you open channels of communication and enlist your children in making changes.

Connect with Colleagues

For many of us, work not only is a source of income, but also shapes our identity. Our careers affect our self-confidence, inform our sense of purpose, and enable our social affiliations.⁶ Despite the central role of work in our lives, though, many of us don't dedicate much time to thinking proactively about when, where, or how we work. We often assume that our conditions of work are set in stone and that the only way to survive is to adjust everything *other* than work to accommodate its demands. We cut sleep, relaxation, time with our children, all in deference to what we think is expected from us in our careers and from our colleagues. For some of us, unpredictable and grueling hours are unavoidable. For many of us, though, they just *seem* unavoidable. Our research has revealed practical ways to make changes at work that improve our lives outside work *and* allow us to be more productive in our jobs. But those opportunities for change need to be unearthed. No one gives them to us.

Bosses, colleagues, subordinates, clients, investors, former coworkers, and mentors are all part of the web of people who can help us succeed as parents. When people talk about the connection between work and family, they often articulate a "leave your personal life at the door" approach. But we are all who we are, no matter where we are. And who we are in our careers affects our children's lives, including their emotional health.⁷ We will show you how to strengthen the relationships central to your career so that you have a network of colleagues who want to see you thrive at work, but also outside of work, especially as a parent.

Cultivate Your Community

An ancient, oft-repeated proverb says that “it takes a village” to raise a child. But what you may not often hear is how to build and keep that village in these modern times. Too many working parents feel disconnected from all but a few people in their work and home lives. In order to succeed as a family, you need to get other people on board—community members, caregivers, friends, and extended family—and to do so in a way that makes them feel good about their relationship with you. You probably feel, like most working parents, that you don’t have enough time to invest in any more relationships. But we’ll show you how building your village brings you not only a sense of belonging, community, and connection, but also genuine support. The investment is worth it.

You’ll learn to shift how you think about relationships—each of you on your own and together as a partnership—and you’ll begin to identify opportunities to strengthen existing relationships so they tap into new areas of your life, bringing tangible benefits. If you’re like most people we have seen grow through this process, you will feel replenished as you better understand the support that’s actually available to you in your world.

Try a New Way

It’s common to feel trapped in chains of our own making; we often fail to note how one part of life affects the others and so miss opportunities to find the freedom to make things better when we learn to see the whole and act to change it. It’s more fruitful to think of a pool rather than a prison, and to see how a pebble thrown into the pool ripples out, over time, affecting all the roles we play. You’ll learn to see interconnections between your family, career, community, and personal lives. We’ll help you uncover opportunities to improve the performance and well-being of all those in your family. Smart experiments you’ll plan together will revitalize your world.

We'll tell you stories of families—some we expect may be much like yours—who were skeptical that they could change how they face the demands of the different parts of their lives. We'll share with you what they tried, what worked, and what they learned, especially when things didn't turn out as planned. We'll help you grasp the power of small wins and how to use them to leap forward as leaders, as a parenting partnership, and as a family.

See Yourself Differently

As a result of all of this reflection, conversation, and experimentation, you'll begin to view yourself differently. You'll come to see yourself leading in ways you have not before. Instead of feeling as though you are just surviving, barely keeping your head above water, you will see yourself going strong, like a skilled swimmer in life's waters.

We'll help you reflect on what you've learned—and how you've grown—to solidify your parenting partnership as something like a leadership team. We hope you find yourself fueled by your mutual commitment to a shared future, capable of continual growth, and able to inspire others along the way—your children, of course, but also your colleagues, neighbors, extended family, caregivers, and friends. We'll teach you how to keep the momentum going after you've read this book, inspiring those around you to continuously reflect, connect, and learn together.

Get Started

The ideas we're about to teach you are straightforward guidance for creating meaningful, sustainable change. The tough part is actually investing the time to work through these steps thoughtfully, interactively, and openly. Go at your own pace but avoid the temptation to rush through the exercises. Find a way to write or record your re-

sponses to them that works for you. You can access helpful resources at www.ParentsWhoLead.net.

Being parents who lead requires both individual and collective thought and action. Any strong partnership begins with individuals who have well-founded ideas and aspirations. The challenge—the fun and creative part—is bringing your ideas together. We'll ask you to do this in each chapter after you've prepped separately, to make something new that neither could do without the other. On your own, together, on your own, together—that's the weave. That's the sequence we recommend.

We are confident it'll be worth your while. Take it from another of our workshop participants, Lily Conrad, a project manager, practicing Buddhist, and mother to three-year-old Zainah. We asked her for advice she'd give to you, as a reader of this book, and here's what she said: "You're going to think this is a really big pain in the ass, and there is some pain, but the outcome and the results are phenomenal. All of the difficulty that you have, figuring out who you are and what you value, and figuring out who your partner is and then connecting, is all worth it at the end."

Reflecting, writing, and talking to each other, as we recommend, can seem like a big inconvenience added to already strenuously busy lives. It takes time, it forces you to recognize some truths about yourselves and your lives, and it may lead to some difficult conversations. But there's benefit to be gained from intentionally disrupting the status quo. (See the box "Identify Your Own Goals," and follow the instructions.)

Before we ask you to share your goals with your partner in parenting, let's review some guidelines for working together as a team—and enjoying it. You might actually find it exciting, and quite possibly romantic. Of course, it will probably be frustrating at times, too.

Do your level best to avoid making assumptions about what your partner *really* means, wants, or needs. It's often those partners who have known each other the longest who gain the most from these

IDENTIFY YOUR OWN GOALS

The very first step is for you, as an individual, to think and jot down what you hope to get out of reading this book and doing the exercises we offer. Write down your responses to the prompts so you can refer back to them later and then share them with your partner. Find a quiet spot and take ten minutes to compose your responses:

1. We know you're busy, so why take time out of your schedule to do these things? What's in it for you? For your children? For your career? For your important relationships? In other words, in an ideal world, how would you think, feel, and act differently after reading this book?
 2. What about this book are you most looking forward to?
 3. What's your greatest source of dread?
-

conversations because they're so used to speaking in shorthand and rarely stop to challenge their assumptions. Ask thoughtful questions and encourage your partner to explain thoughts and feelings more deeply. Then listen. By doing so, you not only improve your understanding of each other but deepen your understanding of yourselves. These are critical conditions for lasting growth.

You don't need to agree with everything your partner says or does. We can pretty much guarantee you won't. You can have different goals, values, and approaches and still work together to support one another as parents and in your separate lives. Speak compassionately and respectfully to one another and realize that these potentially difficult conversations are important steps in moving toward the future you

want. (For more guidance before undertaking this initial conversation, check out the last section in chapter 3, “Understand Each Other’s Needs.”)

Be smart about how you work together. Use what you already know about each other to find what works best for you in how you take up the exercises we prescribe. Some partners find that reading each other’s writing in the activities enables a more carefully considered exchange of ideas. Others prefer to just talk it out. Some find that having these conversations in the evenings after the children are asleep offers a serene opportunity for connection; others find they’re too tired and cranky late at night.

You are the experts on you. Don’t be afraid to try out different ways of approaching this book, both on your own and with your partner. Working together, coaching each other, as opposed to doing this sort of work on your own, makes it much easier to get unstuck, to move in

IDENTIFY YOUR SHARED GOALS

Share your goals for participating in this work with your parenting partner. Once you’ve done so, specify both the shared *and* the unique reasons each of you wants to do this project by writing responses to these questions:

1. What are the things you have in common as goals for this venture?
 2. What goals are unique to each of you?
 3. What did you discover by discussing your goals for the journey ahead?
-

a direction you want to go, because you can provide both support and accountability pressure (in a good way) for each other. (See the box “Identify Your Shared Goals.”)

Find the Right Support

We have a few more comments to set the stage before you go further. We are organizational scholars, experts in the fields of both leadership and the relationship between work and the rest of life. We are parents. But we are not marriage counselors, although Stew did work with families in the seventies when he was studying clinical psychology and training as a therapist. Nor are we pediatricians, child guidance counselors, or early education specialists, though we do address directly the physical and mental health needs of children, drawing in part on research Stew conducted in one of the few studies on the impact of parents’ careers on the emotional health of their children.⁸

We’ll provide you with research-based guidance on what we know, but if specific challenges unique to your family emerge that require the expertise of a specialist, we encourage you to seek out their support. There is no shame in seeking help, of all kinds; indeed, doing so can and, we believe, should be a source of pride. And it will serve as a good model for your children that it’s OK to acknowledge problems and to ask for help.

In addition to professional support, we encourage you to be on the lookout for parents who might like to join you on this journey of reflection, conversation, and growth—perhaps to see them as part of your intentional community. In our work with parents, we’ve found that a useful element in the staying power of positive change is the support of other parents. In our workshops, we create coaching exchanges, matching parents with one another to read each other’s writing, provide feedback, maintain accountability, and share experiences and

ideas. It's a good idea to create your own coaching exchange by finding other parents who might like to participate in the journey alongside you. The appendix offers more on the many ways a coaching exchange can be useful, how to launch one, and what to do—and *not* do—to ensure its successful growth.

This book is geared to couples, with some of the exercises to be done by each member alone, and some by the pair. (It can be read by just one partner and not the other, though it's more useful when done so together.) Many single parents have partners in parenting who are not their marital or romantic partners; they might be close friends, extended family members, childcare providers, their own parents (that is, their children's grandparents), and others. If you are a single parent, you might discover, from the exercises we ask you to do, that you're not as alone as you might have thought. You'll be strengthening important relationships not only in your immediate family but also in your extended family, in your job and career generally, and in your friendships and with others in your community. But if, as a single mother or father, you conclude that you are truly on the parenting journey on your own, you might find the more individually focused approach described in *Total Leadership* to be more relevant for your lifestyle.

Most of the parents with whom we've worked, and about whom you'll read in this book, are professionals who are in heterosexual marriages. We try to also address some distinctive experiences, gathered as part of our research, of people who don't fit this type of family structure—gay couples, divorced co-parents, single parents, and couples in which one parent is not working outside the home. But we believe our approach works for parents not just in particular kinds of relationships and not just in particular social milieus or work contexts. Our method is designed to be customized to fit everyone's unique situation, so it works whether you live in a city, in the suburbs, in the exurbs, in a small town, or on a farm, and whether you work in a large corporation or a small mom-and-pop shop, in the business world or in

education, medicine, the arts, government, the trades, or a nonprofit organization.

Most of the partnerships we've studied cope with the demands of work and the rest of life by operating on autopilot. When you're on autopilot, reacting to whatever's next, it's easier to coast along, accepting the status quo, rather than to stop and question how and why you're doing things. Throughout this book, we're going to push you to turn off the autopilot and to rethink your assumptions about yourself, your partner, your children, and your lives together.

You might find yourself resisting opportunities to see or do things in different ways. When you feel that resistance bubbling up inside, remind yourself that this means you are doing something right. If everything you do in this book feels easy and comfortable, you probably won't get much out of it. Indeed, you're probably just skimming the surface. So, when the jitters come, remember what we're telling you right now: your willingness to be vulnerable is your superpower, not your kryptonite. It frees you to explore the principles and tools in this book with an adventurous spirit, an open heart, and compassion for the struggles of others.

We know from our work with thousands of people around the world that it helps to think of yourself as a scientist seeking new knowledge. Your passionate curiosity will help you get the most out of this book. Your children stand to benefit from changes that result from you deliberately trying to make things better. And they'll be learning from you as you model for them what it takes to lead your life with intention.