

The Concrete Jungle

This Book's Purpose

Two men—whose names you'll discover later—found themselves at a crossroads in their lives and careers. Upon coming together, they experienced a collision of knowledge, their pasts, and their hopes and dreams for the future. They also discovered that their educational and professional experiences gave them mutual perspective and common ground. As such, they decided to build what many desire to build: something to call their own, but more importantly, something that could impact other people in a powerful way. What emerged from this collision was a Lead that will help individuals change their perspectives, adopt new mindsets, and provide clarity and focus by causing dominant aspirations to become a dominant focus within people and organizations.

If you're not familiar with the terms *dominant aspiration* (and subsequent *dominant focus*), don't worry; you'll become acquainted with them soon.

The purpose of the book and the Model it describes is to help you formulate that dominant aspiration and

focus, specifically by providing a new perspective about how people should be leading and performing within twenty-first century organizations. It will introduce you to a system that, when fully implemented, will give you peace of mind in the knowledge that you have done what you were hired to do: *lead and create a battle-tested tribe of people*. Yes, we said *battle-tested*. However, you'll have to wait to the final chapter to entirely understand exactly what we mean by that term and how to implement the concept within your life and work.

If you just can't wait to find out more about being battle-tested, then go for it—turn to the last chapter! But for those who want to take the journey with us and witness a Model that addresses challenges in the concrete jungle such as having no clear plan to grow, leading to confusion and chaos predicated by the Leader and underperforming teams. Let's take the first step by examining some realities of the organizational messes in which many people find themselves.

A Few Concrete (Jungle) Truths

We realized several truths on our journey in conceptualizing this Model. We believe that it's important that you understand those truths, too, because in the concrete jungle—our chosen metaphor for the typical not-so-orderly modern organizational landscape—there is, alas, no problem-solving magic wand (and no Easy buttons, either).

You have to realize:

- **Just working harder won't do it.** This is an important ingredient to success, but a hamster can

work hard running on a wheel, and it won't go anywhere.

- **Just trying your best won't do it.** Let's be honest: sometimes our best alone isn't good enough. We are merely humans, after all, and all of us have at least some limitations in our individual capabilities, particularly when those capabilities aren't aligned in a complementary, synergetic fashion with the capabilities of others.
- **Just using checklists won't do it.** While checklists seem like the perfect tool to get things done, all they really do is allow you to point to an item and say, "We did it." In the end, you probably won't reach a high level of performance, because all you'll be likely to see is a string of unrelated tasks that have left you asking, "*What* exactly did I do? And *why?*"
- **Just using the latest technology won't do it.** We will discuss this trap in depth later but, in sum, don't expect technology to be a fix-all.

How can we tell you that all these things won't work?

Because we tried them all, and in doing so, we discovered one ultimate truth: *To truly find a new, higher performance level, you must first change your perspective.* Accordingly, this book is designed to allow you to sharpen your senses so that you can learn the sights, sounds, smells, and, in some cases, tastes and touches of the concrete jungle. Particularly important is

the sense of sight, which, in this case, represents finding your unique perspective. This can happen when you put yourself in a place to receive a new message by becoming humble and teachable, and adopting a mindset that spawns growth.

Don't misunderstand the point about humility. *Humble* doesn't simply mean *submissive* or *reactive*. In fact, examining its root word provides some insight about the source of your unique perspective. The word *humble* originates from the Latin word *humus*, meaning *ground* or *earth*. Survival in the concrete jungle sometimes demands that inhabitants dig deep, past the concrete foundation beneath their feet and into the deepest, richest soil that can provide the growth they need to make new discoveries. Often, many (usually unnecessary) layers of concrete and debris cover this fertile ground. Our point in this instance is to underscore that the foundation upon which you find yourself now standing is a culmination of the life decisions you have made, which brings you to where you are today. Improvement for the future, then, will require that you excavate through the minutiae of your life and (re)discover what makes you, in fact, *you*. This book will help you determine your essence, thereby helping you re-form your foundation for improvement.

Realize, though, that the process of mental excavation is much like the physical one: difficult, gritty, and even painful. However, it's also similar in that the pains that digging causes are well worth the find. And unlike the pain from your current concrete foundation, they're only

temporary, not permanent. Either through your current pain or your imagined potential, we hope this work will help you see a new vision of the future and realize that it's time to start digging.

We will help you get started with the “mental mining” you need to do to understand the message in this book, since this will put you in a position to truly comprehend and internalize it. After all, if you're not willing or ready to do the heavy lifting to understand yourself or your career, you'll soon find yourself in a place where you will be left to take only whatever leftover scraps the concrete jungle offers, if any at all.

The Song That Spawned This Book

When we began to discuss writing this book, we revisited a 1987 song from the Guns N' Roses band's debut studio album, entitled *Appetite for Destruction*. We listened to the song “Welcome to the Jungle” and tried to capture the thought process that the band underwent while writing it (as much as we could without the use of certain influential chemicals, of course). Later, we learned that the song was about challenges the band had faced, and the harsh realities of trying to connect their message with an audience while trying to make a living amid the challenges of the music industry.

More than a tale of a band's woes, this song is now a call of the wild in a new jungle—the concrete jungle of many organizations. This is the place where the once-mighty lion is no longer guaranteed to remain king, and

where instead a new breed of animal is evolving, one that can adapt to the new environment, gain perspective, then follow an intentional mindset to create a new order from the current chaos.

We call these new animals Zebras and Cheetahs, because they exhibit qualities of both these breeds. Like a zebra, they boast a distinctive appearance that others can easily recognize. Like a cheetah, they possess great speed and are particularly quick accelerators. And like both, they have an ability to utilize their senses so well that they excel in adapting to their environments. Simply stated, they look different, run faster, and are agile—thus, they can escape the chaos around them.

You may currently possess traits of either a Zebra or Cheetah and that's normal. Throughout the book, we will refer to this new hybrid Leader as a Zebra and Cheetah Leader (Z&C Leader). While reading, we challenge you to recognize which animal is a reflection of your unique perspective, education, and experience and possible areas you want to grow that are outside of the instincts found in each. Being intentional about what you want to gain from this journey will help you become the Leader you want to become.

The Concrete Jungle

Chaos? Did somebody say, “Chaos”? (If you'd like, you can re-read that last sentence in a voice like former NFL coach Jim Mora used in his infamous 2001 “Playoffs?!?” press conference rant.)

Yes, we did, and in one word, you've been quickly yet firmly acquainted with that life place we dubbed the concrete jungle. It's a world of incessant phone calls, meetings, e-mails, voice mails, text messages, more phone calls, more meetings, more e-mails, more voice mails, and more text messages, all flooding in from your land line, smart phone, laptop, desktop, and tablet computers, creating what we call the *current of the urgent* (which we'll discuss in more detail later). And don't forget the plethora of social media—Facebook, Twitter, Skype, instant messaging, and so on, that rounds out the technology that amplifies much of the noise we hear in this place. While it's disguised as “getting things done,” this noise actually creates a sense of hysteria among organizational members (which we call *the tribe*). Throughout the book we'll be referring to “the tribe” as a group working together through struggle and success. Think of it as a balance between the anthropological definition of tribe and Seth Godin's perception of the term.

There comes a point within a tribe that no one can hear any kind of clear message. You're too busy cleaning out your in-box, deleting and responding to e-mail, and asking yourself why people consistently waste your time with pointless committees and meetings. Yes, we thought you, too, had taken a few swims in the current of the urgent, which drags you deeper and deeper into the concrete jungle.

Complete with its own hierarchy, rules, and terrain, this jungle doesn't simply yield to the roar of the lion

anymore. We believe this occurs for several reasons, but the primary one is that the other noisemakers we find in the concrete jungle (including the 10,000-pound gorilla named Culture that you'll meet in Chapter 2) have muffled or even muted this roar. Culture is constantly screeching, beating his chest, and wanting to exercise his power to do what he wants to do rather than what the tribe was brought together to do.

This, in turn, creates a struggle to hear a clear, concise message throughout the tribe. The Zebras and Cheetahs Leader rises above the struggle and noise, leading the tribe through their unique perspective. By virtue of their unique perspective, education, and experience they are the rulers of their tribe and the rulers of the concrete jungle.

Providing clarity amid the chaos requires four things (which we will encapsulate here and expand upon later): *developing awareness* of the realities that the tribe faces; understanding the concrete jungle's *complex order*; *clearly defining the success* the tribe desires; and *creating a new level of professionalism* that leads to direction and focus. You will gain momentum during this process, with knowledge that the tribe is preparing itself well for life in the concrete jungle. Clarity, direction, and ultimately focus all evolve through the following sequence of four activities:

1. **Developing awareness of the realities faced by the tribe.** Any tribe's natural point of origination is usually to let sheer force determine how

the tribe should exist—that is, who should lead, who should follow, and the precise course the tribe should take. But tribes will not last if they worship sacred cows like easily visible indicators, typical benchmarks, annual performance ratings, or brands that have outlived their lifecycles—all things that may have propagated life in the jungle at one time. Having a dominant aspiration connected to an emotional theme that every tribe member comprehends begins with drawing a clear picture of the true, actual circumstances your organization faces, regardless of how positive or negative they may be.

- 2. Understanding the complex order of the concrete jungle.** Tribe members want to know what their future with the tribe will look like. Without this candid approach to reality, their senses will become distorted. They won't be able to successfully confront the vast vacuum of the unknown because they'll be operating according to a non-calibrated sense of what is and isn't real. Individuals cannot survive in the concrete jungle without reliable senses. When they recognize their status as an endangered species, they perceive, in their desperate, disorderly state, a vicious environment where survival is literally impossible at both the personal and organizational levels. The role of leadership within the tribe today is to leverage all members' talents. This requires knowledge of

the jungle, the tribe's systematic core functions, and identification of vested partners who share the same beliefs. All of this enhances the tribe's chosen direction and pace through speed and integration of work initiatives.

3. Clearly defining the desired levels of success.

Once its members understand the order of the jungle, you will further clarify what constitutes success for the tribe by sharing the unique perspective and mindset that the Zebras and Cheetahs Model creates. You will determine a catalyst for recognizing that success by using a force we call *collective passion*. Why do we use this term? First, the concept of *collective* relates to the whole. Everyone in the tribe is working together within the same context, which in this case is the context of the dominant aspiration. We can view the concept of passion in its modern context, which involves deep affinity for something; however, seeing it as that alone sells the concept short. The word *passion* comes from the Latin word *passio*, which means "to suffer." Therefore, *collective passion* actually involves first the collective struggle, then the collective power found after moving through this struggle to the other side, to a place where you'll find affinity for the tribe and its members. Stated plainly, collective passion helps create a cooperative, unified environment within your organization.

4. **Creating new levels of professionalism.** What exactly will happen when an organization reaches such a plane of passion? Quite simply, the relationship between tribe members will change, specifically in this way: competition *within* the tribe will be replaced by new levels of cooperation. This will then allow the competitive focus to fall where it belongs: *outside* the tribe. You can then base all results on factors within the concrete jungle instead of factors related to the tribe.

Several sociological dysfunctions suddenly disappear when this happens. For instance, tribal members will stop using each other as metrics for their own performances (bringing to mind the old fable of the two bear-chased people running through the woods, each of whom is intent only on outrunning the other, rather than outrunning the bear). Such internal competition, in which members either try to excuse their own inadequacies or backstab those whom they may see as more productive workers, eventually leads to the downfall of the entire tribe (because the bear could easily start chasing the next person once it devours the first one!). Another group dysfunction that will disappear is the trite, pointless end-of-the-year evaluations that provide no clear, accurate sense of tribal members' contributions. And by eliminating that cancer, you subsequently abolish another: a lack of accountability. Why? Tribal members will clearly have their work cut out for them, and their productivity levels will be quite obviously displayed for all to see (bid goodbye to overhearing destructive comments

like, “Well, it’s almost Christmas, and no one does any real work until after the start of the new year.”).

The Relationship between the Jungle and the Tribe: Having, Knowing, Understanding

We once heard a wise Leader tell his tribe, “It is better to know than it is to have; but it is better to *understand* than it is to know.” We agreed, and then immediately began to wonder exactly how this applied to us. We didn’t truly understand this axiom in the early stages of writing this book. However, as we pushed further into our work, we gained a clear appreciation of how it applied to those desiring to make a shift in perspective and mindset. That appreciation evolved into three clear questions:

- **Having:** Do we *have* a tribe of people with the necessary skills to perform in the needed roles, and are they the right people to continue to perform these skills and roles as we move forward?
- **Knowing:** Without reservation, does our tribe *know* that it needs to shift to a new level?
- **Understanding:** Does our tribe *understand* exactly what it needs to do to make that shift happen?

Individual and Collective Power

This book’s power lies in helping you gain clarity, focus, and direction about the Leader in you, the tribe you lead,

and principles of a Model that will help your organization deliver on its promise. This precision and drive help to take complicated growth and make it simple, create total engagement, and buy in to the dominant aspiration of the tribe, place tribe members in a structured time and value system resulting in new levels of performance with new levels of engagement, and ultimately incentive people in a systematic way. By developing a system, becoming intentional about the results desired, and understanding the cues from challenges, you can become a Zebra and Cheetah Leader who is ready to craft a message that will create change. If it sounds difficult, you understand it well, because it should. But any worthwhile win in your life will require you to reach past your current state of being and start digging below your foundation to find what lies within you.

Setting the Pace

The pace of the life in the concrete jungle can lead to fatigue and create blind spots among the tribe, which prevents them from envisioning the landscape in its entirety and thus lowers productivity. As such, the Model around which this book revolves demands speedy integration, but not simply speed for the sake of speed alone. We prefer to describe this instead as *deliberate speed*. This is different from raw speed, which can create a reckless sense of confusion. Deliberate speed is rapid, well equipped movement undertaken with a sense of purpose and understanding (as previously discussed). The Zebras

and Cheetahs Leader is able to accurately sense when the concrete jungle is dictating the tribe's pace. He or she can then use the Model in this book as a way to infuse speed and integration that connects the essence of the tribe with the way the tribe needs to function.

The Z&C Leader must relate new ideas and methods to make distinctive, positive impressions on customers, while using the principles of accountability woven throughout the Model (and that are very intentional and distinctive, like the stripes on a zebra). In this jungle, speed becomes necessary for the sake of quick, agile, precise movement toward new, fruitful terrain that can provide new opportunities for the tribe (very swift and focused, like the cheetah's movement).

Our integrated Model ties a dominant aspiration (and subsequent dominant focus)—the essence of the tribe—to the channels that deliver it, and illustrates how coaching is needed to create breakthroughs.

Become an Active Participant in Your Own Rescue—And Theirs!

Unfortunately, far too many people are driven into a hysterical state by a lack of having, knowing, and/or understanding. As a result, they are drowning daily in the deadly organizational currents of the heart-of-darkness river of change that flows through the jungle. We will discuss the concept of the current of the urgent later, but for now, just let that metaphor give you another reason why deliberate speed is important.

Learning how to swim next to those caught in the current, while still managing to articulate value and provide solutions that will drive a results-driven rescue, is just as important as completing the rescue itself. It may be even more important in some cases, because drowning people can easily drag their rescuers down with them in fits of desperation. Zebras and Cheetahs Leaders understand the current, how fast it is moving, and its impact in developing and sustaining valuable relationships. This is what will build the trust necessary for effective leadership and subsequent individual and organizational rescues.

Speedy rescues are critically important, since organizations are filled with people who want results but don't know how or where to get them. Most of them have (repeatedly) done the same things in efforts to obtain them: attended seminars, bought books, or took a course (or two, or three, or got a degree, or another degree, or some other educational panacea). Soon, however, the grip of reality started to squeeze them harder and harder: *We must look different from our competitor; absolutely have to be faster to market; and we must be able to change course whenever we find ourselves on the wrong side of the profit and loss sheet*, they realize. What exactly is that realization? That's the current of the urgent—the very real trend that demands that qualified Leaders become actively involved in their rescues. But first, these Leaders must learn how to plan their own rescue while swimming alongside their subordinates in the current.

A Word of Caution

Zebras and Cheetahs encapsulates the lessons from a time when a coach and a strategist decided to look at the world with a unique perspective; intentionally develop a Model that connected vested partners; and help create a new breed of organizational Leaders who understand that an investment in improving those around them is a sound investment in their own success. Our different outlooks provide the basis for our distinctive approach. We each work with corporations, small businesses, and Leaders, Micheal as a coach and Colby as strategist. This allows for each of us to bring our unique perspective (how we see it), unique education (how we know it), unique experience (how we connect to it) to our unique talent (how we deliver it). Coach Burt specializes in coaching and developing talent in a systematic way that allows people to do something tomorrow that they simply can't do today. He learned this skill through the many wins and losses of coaching high school basketball for more than a decade, infusing leadership academies and success principles that culminated in building a championship culture. Micheal retired from coaching in 2008 and his championship culture is still alive and his former school continues to find itself in the championship game or deep in the playoffs almost every year.

Colby, a former NCAA Division III football player, completed a PhD at 27 and wrote a dissertation surrounding the coach-athlete relationship. He initiated a small college football program in 1998 without offices or phones or computers, practice or game fields, uniforms

or players—just a dream. Colby was part of a coaching staff that recruited 100 players, was ranked nationally in its second year, and built an organization based on the possibility of what could be. It was during those 20-hour workdays that he learned how to compete on unique perspective, experience, and education. As former coaches in different sports we both have a mindset that organizations need someone to drive the change they seek. Those who lead organizations must have crucial conversations with employees, challenge them to do things they might not want to do, in order for them and the organization to become what they are supposed to become.

Those who read this work will recognize some very powerful, very real, takeaways. You will feel confident in the fact they you're highly capable of changing yourself and the organization you lead. So get ready to dive into a book that mixes stories, passion, successes, and failures, all of which have been drawn from the all-too-real struggles both Micheal and Colby faced collectively and individually. Prepare to read about the harnessed power of collective passion that we've seen successfully bind people and ideas together by challenging existing mindsets of daily rituals and routines of work and life.

But before you go any further, you must know that we see the world differently than we used to see it, with a filter of understanding what it truly takes to win in the concrete jungle. This filter creates both challenges and opportunities. We believe that this book gives us a wonderful opportunity to take the time to share what we have learned with you. If you can take the time to pause, think,

reflect, and begin to see the world around you in your distinctive way, the principles this book presents can add significant value to your life and your organization.

What you will take away from this book is the ability to intentionally gain focus on the steps you need to take to connect who you are to what you do, and then to help those in your charge understand why *they* matter, and how they connect, as well.

The time to witness the new kings of the concrete jungle has begun. Zebras and Cheetahs will now reign supreme because they can articulate their value to the world in unique ways and find direction by connecting to the essence found within them and their organizations. They look different, they run faster, and they're more agile than those around them, and none of this is by happenstance. It begins by understanding just as much about yourself as you do about the landscape of the concrete jungle.

Understanding how to become a Zebra and Cheetah Leader begins with a heightened awareness of the competitive advantage that comes from your unique perspective, education, experience, and struggle. Because of your past, you look different from others in the jungle. “Running faster” means responding quickly to new or emerging markets, and “staying agile” implies that you can see and seize opportunity.

Here are five tips for the Zebras and Cheetahs Leader:

1. Use your unique past to help your organization build a bigger future.
2. Look differently at your workplace tribe and the jungle because of the lessons learned. This will result in a new mindset about growth, differentiation, and leadership.
3. Don't wait for opportunity. You should wake up every morning and use a specific growth strategy to take on the jungle that is based on the highest value of your time driven by a dominant focus you want to manifest.
4. Take what appears to be incredibly complicated growth patterns and make them simple, eliciting buy-in from others and removing obstacles for growth.
5. Do not see challenge, only opportunity.

As you further hone your leadership skills, continually ask these six questions:

(continued)

(Continued)

1. How is my perspective different from any other in the jungle?
2. Through my education, what do I know that will give me and the tribe an added advantage?
3. What are the top three experiences that have shaped who I am and who I want the tribe to become?
4. What past struggles have helped me think better, make better decisions, and communicate in a way that the tribe understands?
5. Where is the most opportunity for growth for me and my tribe?
6. How can I make all of this simple and easy for others to understand?