

Chapter One

Dreaming with Determination

With Dennis Shirley

*All people dream, but not equally.
Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their mind,
Wake in the morning to find that it was vanity.
But the dreamers of the day are dangerous people,
For they dream their dreams with open eyes,
And make them come true.*

—T. E. Lawrence

Dreaming and Believing

When Martin Luther King Jr. stood before the Reflecting Pool in Washington DC on a late August day in 1963, he did not declare that he had a *strategic plan*. He didn't list a set of key performance indicators or specify any targets for meeting them. Dr. King, as we know from his passionately delivered speech, had a dream—an improbable dream that his “four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”¹ Within just two generations,

that dream and all the actions it inspired helped give rise to the first African American president of the United States.

Without dreams, profound human and social change would scarcely be possible. Uplifting organizations and their leaders aspire to and articulate an improbable dream that is bolder than a plan or even a vision, and they inspire others to be part of it. Dreams like Martin Luther King's articulate the possibility of change and insist on its necessity.

Inspiring dreams is one of the very first factors that come into play when creating something from nothing or turning failure into success. Dreams describe an imaginable future to hope and strive toward, a vision that offers something far more desirable than the present state. Dreamers don't pressure people to change against their will; instead, they inspire people to change by eliciting, appealing to, and expressing their ideals, aspirations, and beliefs, so that they might believe in the possibility of unprecedented change.

Dreams are most powerful when they are held collectively by a community, rather than pursued for individual self-interest. The most inspiring dreams are therefore fundamentally connected to improving an entire organization, whole communities—even entire countries. These kinds of stimulating visions add meaning to people's lives and offer hope in the midst of despair. The following three elements of inspiration are especially integral to uplifting leadership and we will see them at work throughout this chapter and those that follow:

- A broad and inspiring dream **extends far beyond numerical targets**. It doesn't home in on being in the top five, or emphasize vague and lofty goals like being "world class." Instead, this kind of dream doesn't only promise to raise performance and increase output; it also strives to *change people's lives for the better*. It promises to bring them to a better place. This often occurs by inciting social uplift in terms of opportunity, equity,

or advancement for those who have been marginalized or discriminated against. In two poor London boroughs that had been dogged by educational failure, the dream in Hackney was that parents would fight to get their children into its schools; in Tower Hamlets, it was that poverty would not be an acceptable excuse for failure.

- The dream's inclusive nature expresses a **sense of collective identity**. This means that the vision doesn't just belong to a few top leaders. It's also the property and prerogative of entire communities to which people form deep attachments, from the highest ranking executives to the lowest status assistants, from frontline workers to office staff in the back. The commonwealth at Scott Bader chemicals and resins creates an unbreakable bond of investment and involvement throughout the workforce that joins everyone together with a sense of social responsibility.
- The dream is made up of a **clearly articulated relationship between what has been and what will be**. It's not merely a description that harkens back to the past or looks toward the future, but that shows the connections and continuity between valued heritage and needed progress. This helps people to know where they are going by encouraging them to recall where they once started out. They are reminded what they are made of and where they came from. People in the small and economically depressed town of Burnley, in England, dared to dream that its soccer club could once again play in the top echelon of the English Premier League.

The power of inspiring dreams to raise collective performance and turn failure into success occurs in all kinds of places. One of the least likely junctures is where the rubber really does hit the road: in the auto-manufacturing industry. Yet this is just where we've found some of the most daring dreams of all. When Henry Ford established the Ford Motor Company, he declared that

its purpose would be no less than “opening the highways to all mankind.”²

On a crisp winter evening, the night before the 2009 US Presidential Inauguration, breaking news first reached the Italian City of Turin that would transform the city’s and the world’s understanding of its auto-manufacturing industry forever. The *Financial Times* was the first to report a possible partnership between Fiat Auto and American auto giant Chrysler.³ Just months later, when Chrysler collapsed like a house of cards along with General Motors, the partnership became a reality. By the end of 2013, it was poised to turn into a full merger. On New Year’s Day, 2014, Chrysler Motors and the United Autoworkers Union became “completely absorbed” by Fiat in a full merger when Fiat bought out the 41 percent share in Chrysler of the United Autoworkers Union Trust.⁴

Fabbrica Italiana Automobili Torino (FIAT) had come a long way from the brink of bankruptcy in 2004. Founded in 1899, Fiat had built a classic and honorable reputation throughout most of the twentieth century as one of the pioneers of the European car industry.⁵ For a very long time, it was believed that what was good for Fiat Motors was also good for Italy as a nation. Fiat’s Golden Age had taken place during the 1960s, when the tiny Fiat 500 was a market success and an iconic element in romantic European movies. Under Gianni Agnelli, grandson of the company’s founder, Giovanni Agnelli, Fiat courted success through a chic sense of 1960s Italian style and quality.⁶

But signs of a slow decline at Fiat were already evident by the early 1980s. A robust yet overprotected domestic market in which Fiat sales peaked at 59 percent of market share in 1988, and a European market that still held up respectably at 15 percent, masked a host of underlying problems.⁷ Whereas outsourcing represented only 50 percent of production in 1982, the figure had escalated to 65 percent a decade later—and similar patterns held for design work. The US market didn’t just find Fiat’s boxy

vehicles unattractive; they were also unreliable. Warranty repair costs on the 1974 Fiat Strada wiped out all profits on its sales. By 1984, the company abandoned the US market altogether.⁸

A patrician style of management in this family-run company could no longer adapt to accelerated systems of production and to the increasingly globalized marketing of the modern auto-manufacturing industry. When Gianni Agnelli passed away in 2003, Fiat was in crisis. By 2004, the company had suffered seventeen straight quarters in the red.⁹ A dizzying succession of four CEOs failed to produce a turnaround. Even the Mayor of Turin felt that Fiat was a “badly run company” that seemed headed for the wrecker’s yard.¹⁰

In 2004, Sergio Marchionne was appointed as the first CEO ever to run Fiat Auto without the direct oversight of the Agnelli family. Even though he had no background in the industry, the company’s problems were glaringly obvious to Marchionne when he took over. He described it as a “laughing stock,” even a “cadaver.”¹¹ Fiat had an overextended portfolio; its engineering focus had made it unappealing to stylish twenty-first-century consumers; and dealers had a take-it-or-leave-it attitude toward their customers.

Yet somehow, the company had returned to profitability as soon as 2006—and by 2008, before the global economic collapse, Fiat’s bottom line was solidly in the black. In 2010, they were not merely surviving; they were overtaking and even *taking over* global competitors. The most dramatic of these was its audacious partnership with America’s third-largest auto manufacturer, Chrysler, in the midst of the global economic collapse in 2009. As a leading Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*, expressed it: “Our little tin-plated sweetheart arrives in the land of the steel Cyclops to save them from their folly.”¹²

To an enthralled business press, the oddball Canadian-Italian Marchionne was the company’s savior—described as “strong,” “visionary,” “eccentric.” There seemed to be an element of managerial machismo about the move to partner with

Chrysler, of course, but there was more to it than that. A big part of Marchionne's and Fiat's improbable dream was to bring small energy-efficient cars in great numbers to the US market. This move endeared Fiat to the Obama administration, and opened up the opportunity to form a partnership with Chrysler.¹³ The move—which gave Chrysler access to small-car technology and smaller engines—would “help preserve American jobs” and “significantly accelerate Chrysler's efforts to produce fuel-efficient vehicles,” Marchionne announced.¹⁴ By the end of 2013, Fiat's share in this partnership had reached almost 60 percent.¹⁵

Fiat's commitment to making and marketing small, energy-efficient cars aligned with the global ambitions to combat climate change and to use energy resources prudently and profitably. Reducing waste—of fuel, materials, and energy—keeps costs down and is more environmentally responsible. To Sergio Marchionne, any waste is unethical.¹⁶ Eventually, Fiat's goal is to reduce waste to zero.

Pursuing a moral or environmental purpose needn't make us sacrificial and sanctimonious—and that's something Fiat understands absolutely. People will not buy ugly cars, even if they are energy efficient. So just as it has through much of its history, Fiat associates itself with pleasure and style as well as profits and responsibility.

Before the move to partner and ultimately merge with Chrysler, Fiat had already launched the refashioned Cinquecento (500) and seen it become a great market success.¹⁷ The new product linked cutting-edge innovation to a classic past. Fiat knows where it is going in part because it has reestablished pride *in where it has been*. Evoking people's youthful romanticism is one way to reengage them as drivers and designers of the future. Reconnecting customers with more youthful periods of hope, pride, and pleasure helps drive out any associations with failure in the recent past. The reinvention of classic brands provides a primal bridge from a better past to a brighter future.

Fiat's designers and advertisers are passionate about their products and the emotions they arouse. In a high-end European advertising campaign for Fiat's luxury Lancia brand, Hollywood actor and activist Richard Gere took a spiritual drive up to Tibet. Openly gay fashion icon Steffano Gabbana controversially kissed a descending black female angel. Here, purpose and pleasure, style and difference, moral dedication and passionate desire are strongly and often startlingly intertwined. The uplift is simultaneously emotional, social, and environmental. It connects Fiat's present to the best of its past while also linking its future to higher moral purposes of ecological responsibility and human rights. It uses inspiration to forge an aesthetic and ethical identity. Succeeding for its own sake is not Fiat's goal. Embedding success within an emotionally inspirational and socially responsible sense of the better life that success can bring is more emblematic of the company's future aspirations and original identity.

Fiat is not the first or the only organization to uplift performance by using inspirational goals, images, myths, and narratives that remind people of the best versions of who they are, what they once were, and who they truly want to be. Other organizations have demonstrated this ability to forge powerful and positive connections between the future and the past, between inspiration and identity. We see another such example in the world of sports.

When the US women's soccer team lost its top position in the world rankings, the team members' dream was not to retain the Number 1 slot. Rather, they sought to "raise the level of sport for women everywhere" and "be part of the worldwide social revolution which sees women fulfilling a different role in society."¹⁸ They did so by donating more voluntary time to local community events and projects where they were playing than their male counterparts in Major League Soccer were doing. Women's sport has gained more and more attention annually since the US women's soccer team set these goals in 1991. And along the way, the team also won the World Cup in 1999.

When Gary Erikson invented the popular energy snack Clif Bar, which he named after his adventuresome dad, his goal was to combine his love of adventure with the passion he developed for cooking in his mother's kitchen. Erikson wanted to produce a tasty, nutritious alternative to the bland, highly processed power bars available in 1990. Clif Bar's brand vision became simply "sustaining people in motion."¹⁹ Its annual reports don't only or even mainly issue financial data to shareholders. Instead, they set out other indicators of the company's contribution to sustainable development and healthy eating—including growth in use of organic ingredients, donations to valued nonprofits, and limiting the company's ecological footprint. Commenting on a challenging national recall of tainted peanut products, the company's 2009 report affirmed that Clif Bar had for fifteen years "been able to make financial decisions based on a long-term vision of a healthy business rather than short-term requirements that limit costs and maximize short-term profits," and that its disciplined philosophy of "living within its means" had enabled it to "weather the storm."²⁰ As Erikson points out in his book *Raising the Bar*, "These ideals inspire and motivate our work."²¹

What we learn from organizations as dissimilar as Fiat, Clif Bar, and US Women's Soccer is the power of reaching for something greater than fame or success for their own sake—whether it is ecological responsibility, health and fitness, or women's opportunities and success. In his book *The Good Struggle*, Joseph Badaracco describes this as "reaching the heights"—not just of performance numbers, but also of social purpose and emotional excitement.²² Reaching the heights is the first thing to do when you are after uplift. Most people have heard the famous tale of President Kennedy asking a cleaner at NASA what his job was. The cleaner replied, "To put a man on the moon." Both the president and the NASA employee grasped this concept: the first thing to do is to articulate the improbable dream. The more important thing is that everybody, not just you, comes to believe it.

Uplifting leadership is not primarily about a number or a ranking that utilizes envy as its overriding emotion. It is found in what a community aspires to become and in how this serves a greater good. Instead of having no dreams, idle dreams, or hollow dreams, filled only with the indicators of self-seeking success, uplifting leadership is about an inspiring and inclusive dream that draws people upwards by addressing their desire for self-actualization, their needs for service to the community, and their wish to be part of something bigger than themselves. It articulates a dream that defines a desirable destination for people, and does so in ways that are consistent with the best of what they once were or what they have always been.

Dreaming and Daring

The kind of inspiration that uplifts people, organizations, and communities is more than an idle wish or a fancy speech; it must also instigate powerful, new, and deliberate actions. It is evident in what people *do* as well as what they say, and requires courage, daring, and determination to bring it to fruition.

People don't always greet dreams and their dreamers with instant adulation. More often than not, bold visions provoke incomprehension, opposition, ridicule, and doubt. When Alexander Graham Bell took his patent to the Telegraph Company, which later became known as Western Union, the response was that this "ungainly and impractical device" was not as good as sending a messenger to the telegraph office.²³ Uplifting leaders and their first followers are not defeated by these doubts; rather, they are emboldened by them. They enjoy having others underestimate them because doubt and derision just fuel their determination to succeed.

Individuals who have led others through profound change do not do so without fear of failure, danger, or what the future might hold in store. Every leader experiences a moment of self-doubt

where he or she faces the real prospect of defeat. What defines uplifting leadership is how these individuals deal with their own and their followers' fear—and do so in a way that creates uplift.

There will always be questions that test the scruples of even the most effective leaders: “Have I promised too much?” “Will I let people down?” “Do I have the stamina to see this through?” “Am I exploiting people for my own ambition?” But such leaders do not freeze in the headlights or take flight at times of self-reflection and even self-doubt. Instead, the improbable dream and formidable challenge of surmounting failure, escaping closure, or avoiding bankruptcy instill a sense of determination to overcome barriers to change and see the process through to victory.

Facing down opponents to a dream requires that leaders act with personal courage, strength, and fortitude. Such a response calls on everyone to find something within themselves they may never have realized they had. This process calls upon people who are prepared to fight and to elevate entire communities.

Dean Vogel, Eric Heins, and Mary Rose Ortega are leaders who embody such qualities. They lead an organization that has been helping hundreds of the lowest performing schools in California—those that are in the bottom 20 percent of student achievement—to turn around. The kind of organization that is doing this work may well surprise you, and we shall reveal its identity shortly; but first let's learn a little more about these three leaders. All of them are dedicated, dyed-in-the-wool teachers. Vogel, the organization's president, was an elementary school teacher and an award-winning school counselor for thirty-nine years. Ortega, a member of its board of directors, taught in challenging inner-city Los Angeles elementary schools for almost as long. She decided to become a teacher as a young student because she was prevented from using her Spanish language skills to translate for a new immigrant student from Mexico. Eric Heins, the youngest of the three, is a former music teacher who “got tired of watching the arts being eliminated” when schools devoted more

and more time to driving up test score results by teaching to the test. Heins just wanted to “get back to good teaching” by engaging children with their learning.

There’s no denying that this organization had its work cut out for it. In a half-century’s time, California went from being one of the most admired educational systems—with an average spending per pupil above the national average and graduation rates climbing annually—to a wasteland of educational underachievement. Funding fell below the national average in 2000; by 2003, California’s students performed worse on the National Assessment of Educational Progress than all other US states except Louisiana and Mississippi.²⁴

Yet even in the face of all this, Vogel, Heins, and Ortega’s organization—the California Teachers’ Association (CTA), the largest state teachers’ union in the United States—is showing encouraging results.²⁵ A report by the California Department of Education found that “an analysis of the Academic Performance Index (API) of participating schools indicates that their average performance exceeded the average performance of schools statewide, as well as an appropriate comparison group of schools in the early years of the program.”²⁶ In other words, the schools participating in this program progressed at a faster rate than those that were not in the program. An independent research evaluation also found that “on average, schools are making greater gains with African American and Hispanic students, English Language Learners, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students than similar schools.”²⁷

The work the CTA has done and the admirable results it has achieved do not seem to fit with the less-than-flattering portrayal of teachers’ unions in the media. Indeed, they have been given quite a thrashing in recent years. The multi-million-dollar movie *Waiting for Superman* shows shocking instances of teachers’ unions failing to deal with incompetent members at great cost to the system. In *Special Interest: Teachers’ Unions and American Public Schools*, Stanford University political scientist Terry Moe

attacks teachers' unions for defending their own special interests at the expense of the public interest.²⁸ And *Wall Street Journal* editorial writer Peter Brimelow provocatively titled his own book on teacher unions *The Worm in the Apple: How Teacher Unions Are Destroying American Education*.²⁹

So when the California Teachers' Association set out to help large numbers of Californian schools to turn around, it had a real fight on its hands. Vogel, Heins, and Ortega knew they'd have to fight for the educational rights and opportunities of the state's most disadvantaged students. They were prepared to dispel public and political stereotypes about the threat of teacher unions and the damage they supposedly cause. And they had to lead a fight within the union itself to embark upon a new vision of where the organization—and the whole teacher union movement—should be going. But before facing all these obstacles, the CTA had one of the biggest fights of its life—with the state's governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Governor Schwarzenegger is as formidable an opponent in real life as he is in the movies. Indeed, California's Governor had a personal life narrative and a knockabout style that led voters to return him to office in a landslide election in 2006. However, CTA leaders were not part of the popular support for the governor. They were in fact outraged when Schwarzenegger removed billions of dollars from the education budget to address shortfalls across the system. So in August 2005, the union sued Schwarzenegger for violating the rulings of previous court cases that required the state to allocate a defined percentage of its revenues to education, especially for low-income students of color. In a ruling in the May 2006 case of *CTA v. Governor Schwarzenegger*, the California Supreme Court sided with the teachers' union.³⁰ The governor was ordered to restore \$2.3 billion to the education budget on terms to be negotiated with the CTA. The CTA had won its first fight and perhaps its biggest one. But in other ways, the battle had barely begun.

CTA's next struggle was internal, as it attempted to answer the question: what would it do with its gold-plated opportunity? It did not disburse the \$2.3 billion to its members in salary and benefits or simply spread the money across the schools on a per capita basis. This would have ignored the system's vast funding inequities between affluent and impoverished school districts. Instead, the union designed and implemented a change model that ran against the grain of other models that school systems throughout America were adopting.

Plenty of other US educational reforms had taken place in school systems that had registered persistently poor results. These districts and state departments frequently trumpeted their uncompromising decisions to fire principals, remove teachers, close down schools, and parachute in no-nonsense turnaround teams—efforts that had little lasting or widespread success, and that only provided temporary recoveries.³¹ Others came at the expense of taking the best teachers or students from neighboring schools. The CTA took a different approach and decided to work *with*—not *against*—the teaching profession. It turned teachers into change leaders in every turnaround school, right across the state.

The CTA began by allocating resources to a **teacher leader** in each school. As Mary Rose Ortega explained, “It’s the *teachers* who know what the kids need . . . [who] should be [providing] input into what is being done at their schools with these kids.” The goal was not for teachers to be left autonomous and alone; rather, it was to bring professionals together to take *collective responsibility* for student achievement and school improvement. They took steps toward this outcome by visiting each other’s classes to give constructively critical feedback on how to improve their teaching, and by looking at student achievement data together to pinpoint where they could make interventions. As one educator remarked during an in-depth independent evaluation of thirty-four of the schools, “We have a lot of collaboration time now; and it’s part of our goal to look at data to increase student

achievement. We have data teams on Wednesdays to assess test scores and come up with strategies for improvement.”³² Teacher collaboration wasn’t infrequent or sporadic; it occurred at least weekly. Professional development was related to precise needs that these collaborative groups identified rather than appealing to individual teacher preferences or exposing educators to the thinking of the latest gurus.

Eric Heins drove us to one of the CTA’s project schools, just over an hour out of San Francisco, to see their project in action. The school had recently pulled itself out of what is called “program improvement”—that is, it had not made what the state and federal government regarded as “Adequate Yearly Progress” for two years in a row. Teachers who criticized the school’s previous long-standing principal had been punished. They were assigned classes in new grade levels each year, which meant extra preparation, constant disruption, and a much harder time hitting their test score targets.

Many school reformers had a habit of regarding experienced teachers like these as old, expensive, and in the way. But the new principal “was willing to learn,” as one of the veteran teachers recalled. “We started exchanging articles and books,” and when he really started “asking a million questions,” he saw a group of highly experienced, knowledgeable, and dedicated educators who had become disheartened under the previous principal’s top-down, divide-and-rule turnaround strategies. The new principal realized that, as a group, his teachers knew more about highly effective teaching practices than he did. Several had been involved in a nationally regarded project where schools worked together to improve literacy achievement. Others had given up their own time to connect with outstanding professionals across the country to improve students’ writing skills. Like all good leaders, this principal realized that his job was not to be smarter than his teachers at their jobs, but to get them to collaborate more effectively and capitalize on their skills collectively.

Teacher leaders in the school used the CTA money to employ additional teacher support. This allowed them to meet with colleagues during the day to look at their students' achievement data together. Teachers also visited other schools in the region that seemed to be realizing improved results with similar kinds of students. They learned from their colleagues and from other schools, and they improved by moving their professional capital around the system more effectively.

Despite the fact that the school had been losing its higher-performing students and families to competing charter schools and a more affluent neighborhood school, indicators of school achievement “went off the charts” as a result of all these efforts. Results also rose steadily across the network, especially among the most disadvantaged groups of students from minorities or from families in poverty who were uplifted by the union's efforts.

Educators were uplifted too. Many of the state's most experienced teachers—who had felt slightly beaten down by reform methods that demanded compliance instead of commitment—were able to put their rich professional capital into use and spread it around. And when teachers turned into uplifting leaders along with their principals, this uplifted the union as well.

The CTA's shift in focus to improving student achievement in almost four hundred schools resonated with its members' core values. Concentrating on children and their learning “is the norm [for us],” one teacher said. “It's [our] intrinsic [goal].” Many young teachers became inspired and uplifted by a union that was now more professionally oriented and explicitly morally centered—something that now felt like it could be the right place for them.

You and your organization won't be able to achieve very much for very long unless your success is motivated by an inspiring dream. And you will not achieve your dreams or maintain the momentum to do so unless you fight for them tooth and nail. The California Teachers Association took on and won a monumental legal fight against Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger because its

leaders felt morally called to protect and uplift the state's most underserved students. They knew that this also meant they would have to fight for a more noble identity and a higher professional self within their own community by reinventing what teacher unions were professionally and what they stood for publicly.

Leadership that creates something from nothing or turns failure into success is not for the faint-hearted. It requires not only visions and dreams, but also the hard work and struggle to make them come true. In *Leadership and the Art of Struggle*, author Steven Snyder describes how flawed individuals perform remarkable leadership in the face of adversity because they're able to stay grounded in their lives and to understand where their own struggles come from. They take new pathways that others have not explored, and persist and adapt even in the face of personal hardship.³³ Snyder cites many legendary examples, such as Abraham Lincoln, Bill Gates, and Steve Jobs. But some of the best examples of individuals who have had to face some very daunting leadership struggles involve women.

Josephine Cochrane wasn't looking for fame or fortune when she invented the self-operating mechanical dishwasher in 1886. She simply felt that if women could be spared the drudgery of working in their kitchens, she would have to create the solution herself. However, after receiving her first patent, Cochrane encountered reluctance to adopt the idea for the domestic market—not least because many men feared that with access to mechanical contraptions to perform their domestic labor, women might then be left with dangerously idle time on their hands. So Cochrane took her invention into another market instead: to large institutions such as great hotels, which adopted her invention in numbers after a successful showing at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. In an interview some years later, Cochrane recalled what things were like before the Fair, when she was trying to get her first hotel sales: "You cannot imagine what it was like in those days for a woman to cross a hotel lobby alone. I had never been

anywhere without my husband or father—the lobby seemed a mile wide. I thought I should faint at every step, but I didn’t—and I got an \$800 order as my reward.”³⁴

What are you prepared to fight for? What would you stake your reputation and career on? These questions will help you uncover the fight and fortitude that characterizes uplifting leadership to take the difficult but necessary path. It points you away from what’s merely easy and compels you to put in the hard yards if that is what it will take to achieve your moral purpose and inspiring dream.

Dreaming and Doing

Of course, dreams matter little unless you *do* something about them. Inspiration changes nothing unless it is translated into action. However admirable or bold your dreams might be about transforming the driving habits of a nation, they will come to nothing if your auto-manufacturing company goes out of business. Despite the disarming informality of his open-neck shirt appearance, Sergio Marchionne knew that Fiat would not survive unless it cut the design-to-production process from four years to an unprecedented period of eighteen and then fifteen months.³⁵ So he worked at an astounding pace to turn Fiat’s inspiring dream into achievable and detailed action.³⁶

There comes a point when persistence, perseverance, and relentless hard work are essential to almost all acts of uplifting leadership, especially in turnaround situations. “When you’re going through Hell,” Winston Churchill once advised, “keep going!”³⁷ Aside from inspiration, organizations in pursuit of an improbable dream also need a lot of perspiration and, sometimes, even a bit of desperation to keep them going.

At times, this intense experience of endurance can define the difference between extinction and survival, between keeping one foot out of the grave even though the other may have slipped into

it. It's inspiring to be uplifting when things are buoyant. It's essential to be uplifting when they are not. When Lehman Brothers collapsed in September 2008 it set off a global financial crisis that shook the world. Let's take a peek at how one of America's largest businesses, worth around \$54 billion, dealt with this crisis, lifted itself through the global recession, and came out stronger than before.³⁸

The DuPont HQ in Wilmington, Delaware, is the hub of a 212-year-old, *market-driven science* company with spokes into ninety countries around the globe and employs a workforce of sixty-five thousand. Since it began in 1802, DuPont has pioneered the frontiers of science and invented synthetic materials such as Teflon, Lycra, Kevlar, and Dacron. It manufactured materials used in hundreds of familiar household products that uphold their promises to be nonstick, wrinkle-free, lightweight, or flexible.³⁹

In an interview for Ernst and Young, DuPont CEO Ellen Kullman recalls the severity of the financial crisis. "Demand collapsed in every country, in every business outside of agriculture, in a three-month period of time, and it was totally unprecedented. We've seen what we thought were some bad recessions, but none of us had ever seen anything like that before."⁴⁰ Loyal customers cancelled orders; sales volumes halved in some parts of the company; and employees were worried about their future. DuPont needed to respond quickly. Change was mandatory; growth was optional.

DuPont had a long and successful history of growth from its commitment to innovation through science that Kullman valued as part of its long-standing identity. She recognized that the way to grow during the global recession was through *continued and expanding scientific innovation*—bringing new products to new markets. Her dream was to change DuPont from a chemical company to a *market-driven science* company that would find scientific solutions to feed the world's growing population, create more energy sources and protect people from environmental

disasters.⁴¹ DuPont turned doomsday scenarios of famine, energy shortages, and disasters into opportunities for growth.

Kullman achieved this first by making difficult but essential cuts—for instance, reducing capital spending to zero. The company coached sales executives to re-engage with former customers by visiting them personally. They recast existing products for new markets, such as a chemical designed for India’s railways to China.⁴²

Second, they had to rethink their business model and develop service-based ways of engaging with customers—including one with Denso Corp to develop a high-performance plastic from renewable plants for the global auto industry. They won new business as a result. Kullman is clear about this new approach to invention: “we strongly believe that the power of innovation resides in collaboration with our partners.”⁴³ In Mexico, as part of what they call their *Global Collaboratory*, DuPont partnered with a company called Repshel to develop low-cost but strong building materials from polymers and titanium dioxide products. Repshel then collaborated with the government to build affordable and safe family homes in Campeche, Mexico. This kind of collaboration transforms people’s lives.⁴⁴

DuPont understands that no single organization alone will solve the complex issues around food, energy supply, and personal safety that face the world’s ever-growing population. But by collaborating closely with customers, governments, and other providers, DuPont believes that science can create innovative solutions that will eradicate poverty, provide sustainable energy, and protect individuals and the environment. DuPont, which began by making explosives for the US government, has consciously shifted its ethical stance from once being labeled as one of the world’s biggest polluters to being an award winner in environmental and social responsibility.⁴⁵

Kullman found it easier to get people to think differently when their future was so uncertain. But she also understood how

to manage the pace of change in a way that would keep her own organization sustainable, “If you try to change everybody at once, you’re changing nobody,” she said, “so you really have to start in one area, or a couple of areas, and show success.”⁴⁶

The third element of this approach was that—at a time when everyone was adopting the reasonable response of keeping their heads down until the worst was over—Kullman insisted on open, hopeful, and constant communication. She made it a point to maintain consistency of message and direction about how to respond to the crisis and not just survive, but be more successful. Maintaining the mission was essential, and communication was vital when DuPont underwent two restructurings in five months that cut 4,500 jobs (8 percent of the workforce) and imposed furloughs without pay. Kullman went on from there. “We set to further streamline and simplify the company, and we took out a layer of leadership and got really clear on what success looks like coming out of the recession.”⁴⁷

Under Kullman’s leadership, DuPont is now in a better position with higher growth and higher value than when she took over. Getting the company to respond to a change of direction at a time of such uncertainty required powerful uplifting leadership. Revenue grew throughout the recession and the stock market value rose by 119 percent from 2009 to 2014.⁴⁸

This is how you enact uplifting leadership. You struggle together to survive, but you also strive to succeed—and you do both these things at once. You remind yourself of your origins and recast your mission in relation to it. You keep on innovating, even in a recession, but you do so in collaboration with your partners and respond to their local needs. You make the *market drive your business*, rather than the other way round. And you learn your way forward all the time. Kullman reminds us that DuPont is always learning: “We’ve seen pretty much everything that two centuries of a turbulent world history can throw at a company. We’re still here because we *learned* to be resilient. We *learned* how to use

science to innovate, and we *learned* how to transform ourselves in an ever-changing world.”⁴⁹

If you fail to survive in the corporate world, you go out of business. And if you fail to survive in sports—you also go out of business! Yet one of the best ways to survive is to strive to succeed, far beyond everyone’s expectation—even when everything seems against you.

In September of 2006, Dave Edmundson—chief executive of a tiny English football (soccer) club—led his staff retreat to redefine the club’s purpose: achieving promotion to the English Premier League of Soccer, the biggest and wealthiest global sporting brand in the world. The audacious goal was “to become a premier club that will achieve Premier League status.”⁵⁰

The title of the presentation for Burnley Football Club’s retreat seemed like outrageous overreach. Burnley had just spent several seasons sitting in the middle reaches of the second-tier Championship Division—the one below the Premier League. But even that had been an over-achievement. Its wage bills and ticket sales ranked 20th out of twenty-four in the championship. The small Northern mill town is among the 7 percent of the most deprived communities in England.⁵¹ Its entire population of around eighty thousand would not even fill the stadium for Manchester United. Club Chairman Barry Kilby, constantly stressed how the club “punches above its weight” and Alastair Campbell—one-time “spin doctor” for Prime Minister Tony Blair and also a lifetime Burnley fan—believed that “promotion to the Premier League in some ways defied footballing gravity.”⁵²

Less than three years later, in May 2009, we sat with more than twenty thousand Burnley fans at London’s new Wembley Stadium to watch the team win the championship playoff final and fulfill its improbable dream of moving into the Premier League. Emblazoned on the back of the fans’ shirts was the club’s slogan “Dare to Dream.”

How did Burnley achieve so much with so little? How did the club rise from mediocrity into the highest echelons of sporting success? How did it become the smallest town ever to join the English Premier League, with less assets, investment, and support than all its Premier League counterparts?

In fairness, the club didn't completely start with nothing or come from nowhere. It had a fine and proud tradition as one of the twelve founding members of the English Football League in 1888. In the early 1960s, Burnley was also champion of the old First Division (the equivalent of today's Premier League).

Tradition and nostalgia count for something, but they are not enough to feed continuing success. Over the next twenty-five years, Burnley sank to rock bottom among ninety-two clubs in the English Football League. Before the very final game of the season in 1987, their place as the last club positioned them for elimination from the Football League altogether. Burnley was on the edge of extinction.

In the boardroom of Burnley Football Club today, a framed player's shirt hangs prominently on the oak-paneled wall. It does not belong to the club's highest goal scorer or its biggest playing legend. It is the shirt of an unknown, lower-league, bit-part player named Ian Britton whose career would have passed without incident had it not been for a single act he performed that inscribed him in club history forever. Although he was the smallest man on the field and one of the shortest in the game, Britton leapt above all his opponents and scored the winning goal with his head in the crucial final match of the 1987 season. In one split second, Britton lifted Burnley up from the bottom position and kept them in the Football League.

Sometimes, organizations behave like addicts: they have to hit rock bottom before they are willing to change. Almost losing everything is the kind of wake-up call that presents a crucial choice: to give in and go under or to stand up and fight. It is the moment of desperation that sometimes has to precede a period

of inspiration. Burnley's near-death experience was the start of a long recovery: a crisis that galvanized a collective determination to change.

Today, Britton's shirt represents a perverse kind of inspiration. It reminded Chairman Barry Kilby and others of where they came from, of how neglect and excessive indebtedness could imperil the town and the team, and of the need to fight for one's destiny not just during a crisis but also as a relentless quest. The shirt is a reminder that at Burnley, the fight for survival is endless, and that preparedness to keep on fighting every minute of every day can define the dividing line between failure and success. It is not the kind of fight that can be captured only in moments of dramatic conflict. It is the fight that gets people out of bed every day even though they may have lost their partners or their jobs. It is the fight that spurs people on to try again and try harder after every failure or defeat. It is the fight to give everything in time, money, or energy, to a cause that is overwhelmingly important to them. It is the kind of fight that calls not only for daredevil brinksmanship, but also for grim determination, and even drudgery.

Burnley's dream and the everyday hard graft of turning it into reality are rooted in the club's inspirational identity. Burnley's first dream was not just to ascend into the English Premier League, but also to use this to achieve an even bigger dream that was about a "club for its people" that would be the "beating heart of its community, on and off the pitch." Everyone was urged to "pull on the shirt" for Burnley, even and especially whenever the fates seemed against them.

It took more than a quarter century for Burnley to fall and almost the same time for it to rise again. A succession of shrewdly chosen coaches (known in England as "managers"), along with prudent investment from local business entrepreneur and former youth team player Barry Kilby, who joined Burnley as its new chairman in 1998, helped the club to find its feet again, to the point where it was enjoying stable if not stellar success in the championship.

Then, in the middle of 2002, a sudden withdrawal of income from television rights plunged Burnley into an unexpected battle for economic survival. The club instantly lost £6 million in cash flow that it had been counting on over two years. At one point, it was just half an hour from declaring bankruptcy. Chairman Barry Kilby recalled how Burnley found itself in a “scramble for our lives,” “scrapping away,” “dealing with losses wherever we could.”⁵³ The playing squad was reduced by almost a third, the wage bill was almost halved, external debts were paid off, others were restructured on an interest-only basis, and two key players were sold. All of this helped, but it still wasn’t enough.

In the midst of the crisis, Burnley appointed former change consultant Dave Edmundson as its new chief executive. Edmundson’s immediate rescue strategy was up-by-the-bootstraps stuff. He felt that the club needed to sell more “walk-on” or “buy-on-the-day” tickets on the day games were played to compensate for a drop in advanced ticket sales, so he led a highly publicized *Walk up for Burnley* campaign by walking ten miles to work himself. He also persuaded 150 people to donate £1,000 each, which, he reckoned, “really made a huge difference.”

Burnley knew it could draw on its employees’ and supporters’ loyalty and attachment to the team. “I think the club got to that low point,” Edmundson reflected, “and then it was a case of ‘OK boys, it’s time to roll our sleeves up and do what do we need to do to get out of it.’” Sometimes this backs-to-the-wall struggle seemed desperate—sponsored bike rides, cash collections in plastic buckets, or telemarketing drives to improve ticket sales. One eight-year-old girl sent the manager a small bag of silver coins—her own Christmas present—as her contribution to the cause. “I carry that letter round with me to this day and read it in public,” Edmundson tells.

All the effort and determination paid off. The club’s connections to its struggling local community became an asset rather than a liability. Incoming Operational Director Brendan Flood

knew that the team could count on the investments he promised because “they knew I was a big fan.” Edmundson’s successor, Paul Fletcher, was set on “putting something back” into the club that developed him as a player. In the words of one of the members of the senior administrative team who actually doubled up on two jobs, they all “believe in the cause,” “go the extra mile” and give “that little bit extra.”

Once Burnley had survived the crisis and received the additional input of modest outside investment, they were able to dream really big in future years—and to turn that dream into reality. Even the team’s new inspirational and enthusiastic coach, Owen Coyle, was selected because he also possessed the qualities of grit and determination that ran throughout the club as a whole. He was seen as a battler, a “tryer,” who knew how to fight his way up from poverty and out of trouble.⁵⁴ Coyle came from a big Catholic family in the notorious Gorbals, the slums of Glasgow. He was a lifelong teetotaler who worked hard, stayed focused, and didn’t get distracted. In other words, he was the ideal person to continue the tradition of uplifting leadership for the team.

“I started out as a part-time player at the bottom,” Coyle recalled. “So I think having worked as hard as I did, I knew I could do well.” Coyle also knew that like him, most players came up from nothing. Amid all the glamour and distractions, he constantly reminded them where they came from. He wasn’t interested in “players who are going to be chasing finance.” He wanted the ones “who are hungry,” and proud to play for “that Burnley shirt on their back.” The best players, in his view, were those that supporters could be proud of and say, “He might not have had the best game today, but by God he’s a tryer.”

Coyle didn’t see fighting and trying as dour acts of survival, but rather as dynamic drivers of success. He and his coaching team were enthusiastic and uplifting leaders. They believed in themselves, the team, and the purpose they were seeking to achieve together. Players paid tribute to how “enthusiastic” Coyle was;

they told of how “he believes in us so much as individuals and as a team.” The club became “a happy place to come to, and that vibrancy and buoyancy is evident in our play.”⁵⁵

With this combination of inspiration and determination, the team clinched a place in the English Premiership. And although the circling wolves of competitive commercial soccer came to snatch Coyle and all of his managerial team away in mid-season, sending the club back to the championship again at season’s end, it returned with a \$100 million bounty that resulted from having secured premiership status. Its culture of shrewd investment and hard work—along with the inspired appointment of another coach on October 30, 2012—has only perpetuated Burnley’s success. New coach Sean Dyche also knows how to combine uplifting inspiration with dogged determination by believing in his small squad of bargain-priced players, while also being very direct and honest with them. One of the club’s most mercurial players, known for having battles with his fitness and his attitude in the past, described how he was “lower than a snake’s belly” until Dyche came in. Dyche used his “man management” skills to be “straight” with the player and gave him another chance to realize his considerable creative potential on the field.⁵⁶ As we go to press in 2014, the club has secured automatic promotion to the English Premier League once more, far beyond everyone’s expectations.

Conclusion

If dreams are about envisaging reaching a desired destination, however improbable or remote, then they are also about reaffirming an organization’s or community’s identity. They recapture and redefine the best of what the organization or community has been in the past as a platform for creating a better future. Groups that cannot do this may be unable to imagine what they might become because they have no grasp of who they have been or already are.

As exemplified by Fiat, Burnley, and the California Teachers' Association, uplifting leadership is therefore contingent upon much more than having a goal or a set of aspirations. The difference between high and exceptional performance comes down to the extent to which **members subscribe to and genuinely believe in the organization's values, vision, and core principles.** Working within exceptional companies, teams, and groups is not simply a job, but a life choice. It calls for bold imagination yet also draws on grim determination—the willingness to persist, despite all obstacles, in pursuit of a commonly held and deeply cherished dream.

We will see later how the citizens of Finland built one of the world's highest performing school systems and strongest economies from the wreckage of high unemployment in 1992. They have a word that sums up the uplifting qualities of fight and fortitude: *sisu*. This term, a self-acknowledged national characteristic, means to persevere despite all obstacles. A common saying among Finns after a characteristically cold winter or after any significant shared struggle is “It was long and it was hard but we did it.”

Do you and your organization have *sisu*? Can you persevere and prevail? For, in the end, *sisu* is the determined long game of what makes uplifting dreams come true. And the place you might least expect but be most in need of it, is in the midst of upbeat waves of innovation and creativity when brainstorming is rampant and ideas are in full flow. As we will see in the next chapter, without the discipline and determination of *sisu*, most attempts at creativity will come to nothing at all.

