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Commitment #1: Clarify Values

Who are you?" You need to know the answer to this question. It is foremost on the mind of anyone willing to follow you. Leadership is fundamentally a relationship, and for someone to join you on a journey, they first want to know something about you, who you are, and what you stand for. Your leadership journey begins when you set out to discover "this is who I am" and are able and willing to express it.

John Banghoff, for example, knew that he wanted to be in the university marching band since he was nine years old when he attended his first college football game with his father. Making the band his first year felt like a dream come true. "I was on cloud nine," John said. "It was the coolest experience to hear my name called." However, shortly after that, the band's student leaders took John and his new bandmates under the bleachers, where they passed around a flask; afterward, they were escorted to a party and introduced to a band tradition of hazing first-year student recruits. "This turned out to be the worst night of my life," John said. "Seeing all of these people that I looked up to drinking

and harassing me and the other new band members left me seriously questioning whether I wanted to be part of this organization.”

John’s struggle about staying in the band or leaving pushed him to think deeply about what mattered to him. Did his personal values align with the band’s culture? Being part of a team, having an opportunity to put his passion for music into practice, and expressing his gratitude for being involved in the marching band were important values he discovered in the process of asking himself, “Who am I, and what do I care about?” John told us.

I realized that the marching band was something that I still wanted to be a part of because it gave me the opportunity to play the trumpet and that I should work on my own feelings of gratitude for the experience rather than focusing on parts that weren’t what I wanted.

With this clarity, John soon found other band members who shared his beliefs and concerns. “Once I talked about values, I realized that there were other people who felt the way that I did. Together, we could focus on what was right about marching band and figure out what we might do about the negative aspects,” John said. However, before they could do much, the band’s hazing tradition became public news and eventually resulted in the college firing the band director.

It was a time of intense challenge for everyone in the band, as John explained: “It felt like we had no direction and were being punished for the mistakes of a few. We weren’t sure who we could trust, and the leaders we’d come to know and respect within the band were just trying to keep the ship afloat.” The band felt directionless and unmoored, not at all like the prestigious group that John had once yearned to join.

Amid this crisis, John and a few of his peers were selected as squad leaders for the following season of the marching band. Under the leadership of the newly appointed band director, John and the

other squad leaders helped design a cultural blueprint for the band, which articulated new values to help guide it: a tradition of excellence, extraordinary respect, and an attitude of gratitude. “These values gave us signposts to move to when we noticed things that didn’t align with them,” John said. The group’s ability to relate to each other and feel gratitude even through difficult times helped sustain the marching band’s excellence and return it to national prominence.

In implementing the new values and practices, John helped facilitate workshops on the new cultural blueprint, including exercises to show how the band’s values could be lived in real life. John recalls, “Although the process of redefining the band’s culture was not an easy one, it was extremely rewarding to see everyone rally around the new set of cultural values.” At the end of the season, at the annual concert where the band plays for the community and presents awards to its members, John received the Most Inspirational Bandperson Award for helping bring the band back together after its crisis. “That night, as I drove home, I was in tears,” John said. “I was in tears the first night of my band experience and my last night, but in two very different circumstances and for very different reasons. It was the journey between point A and point B that made me the leader I am.”

The personal-best leadership cases we’ve collected are, at their core, the stories of people like John who were clear about their values and used this clarity as a bedrock to give them the courage to make tough choices and navigate difficult terrain. Leaders are expected to be clear about their values and comfortable speaking out on matters of principle and conscience. But to speak out, you have to know what to speak about. To stand up for your beliefs, you have to know the beliefs you stand for. To walk the talk, you have to have a talk to walk. To do what you say, you have to know what you want to say.

Model the Way is the first of The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership we discuss in this book; one of the commitments you must

make to effectively Model the Way is to Clarify Values. In beginning your leadership journey, it's essential that you:

- **Find your voice**
- **Affirm shared values**

Becoming an exemplary student leader requires you to fully comprehend the deeply held values—the beliefs, standards, ethics, and ideals—that drive you. You must freely and honestly choose the principles you will use to guide your decisions and actions. Then you must express your authentic self, genuinely communicating your beliefs in ways that clearly represent who you are.

Moreover, you must realize that leaders aren't just speaking for themselves when discussing the values that should guide their decisions and actions. When leaders passionately express a commitment to learning or innovation or service or some other value, those leaders aren't just saying, "I believe in this." They're also committing on behalf of an entire group. They're saying, "*We all* believe in this." Therefore, leaders must not only be clear about their guiding principles, but also make sure that there's agreement on a set of shared values among everyone they lead. Furthermore, they must hold others accountable to those values and standards.

FIND YOUR VOICE

What would you say if someone asked, "What is your leadership philosophy?" This is the belief system (your core values, principles, and perspectives) that guides your decision-making and actions. Are you prepared right now to say what it is? If you aren't, you should be. If you are, you need to reaffirm it daily.

In order to become a credible leader—one who connects "what you say" with "what you do"—you first need to find your authentic

voice, the most genuine expression of who you are. If you don't find your voice, you'll end up with a vocabulary belonging to someone else, sounding as though you are mouthing words written by some speechwriter or mimicking the language of some other leader who is nothing like you. If the words you speak are not your words but someone else's, you will not, in the long term, be able to be consistent in word and deed. You will not have the integrity to lead.

To find your voice, you must discover what you care about, what defines you, and what makes you who you are. You need to explore your inner self. You can only be authentic when you lead according to the principles that matter most to you. Otherwise, you're just putting on an act. Consider Angel Accosta, who worked for an organization called College for Every Student (CFES), a nonprofit that raises the academic aspirations and performance of low-income kids so that they can prepare for, gain access to, and succeed in college.

Angel is the fifth of six children, raised by a single mother from the Dominican Republic. His mother worked multiple jobs and saved enough to bring her whole family to the United States to pursue the American Dream. "I was the first one in my family to graduate from high school, let alone go to college," Angel told us. "And it wasn't easy."

I had always loved to read, but I was part of the hip-hop culture and intellectual pursuits were laughed at. My friends made fun of me if I talked about the books I was reading. There was a lot of pressure to just stay down.

He also faced a lot of pressure from his family. They were so excited about his potential that they thought they knew what path he should take. When Angel decided to major in anthropology, there were some long and hard conversations, but in the end, Angel's family supported him, and he kept going. "My family's values have always been never say 'never,'" Angel said, "and I found my way. So now I am helping my nieces find theirs. It's tough, but I've been there, and I know what

they are facing. When I tell them my story, they seem to listen a little more. They believe me.”

Michael Gibler found himself in a somewhat similar place to Angel while working part-time at a laser tag arena and arcade during college. Told at his first performance review that he was a good example for the rest of his peers, Michael was promoted to an assistant manager’s position. He was thrilled, but this feeling of excitement soon evaporated because he found that his coworkers didn’t really respect him as their leader, and “it seemed like there was nothing I could do to make them work. No amount of threats, begging, or pleading would make them budge.”

Michael quickly realized that “I had to determine what kind of manager I wanted to be, to be clear about my values, and to be true to them.” High on the list was his commitment to cooperation, collaboration, and camaraderie. He decided he wouldn’t order his coworkers around nor ask them to do anything he wasn’t willing to do himself. For example, “I wouldn’t go sit in the office while everyone else cleaned at the end of the night. I never made demands, and I helped my coworkers even when it wasn’t part of my job.” Within just a matter of weeks, Michael found that “everyone was back on board,” as his coworkers saw that his behavior consistently reflected the congruence between what he said and how he acted.

Leading others begins with leading yourself, and you can’t do that until you’re able to answer that fundamental question about who you are. When you have clarified your values and found your voice, you will also find the inner confidence necessary to take charge of your life. Take it from Tommy Baldacci, who reported having many leadership experiences throughout college and realizing that too many people don’t take the time to reflect, and hence, lack an understanding of their values and philosophy. He told us:

To know how to lead, you need to know where you are going.

To know where you are going, you have to know who you are.

Knowing yourself truly means that you have to be honest with yourself. By understanding myself, I was able to figure out professionally where my passions were aimed. Without knowing myself, I would have had no baseline to refer to.

Our research backs up Tommy's observations. There was a dramatic relationship between how student leaders assessed their leadership skills relative to their peers and how often they indicated "talking about their values and the principles that guided their actions." Only about one in ten student leaders who *seldom or only once in a while* talked about their values and principles claimed to have well-developed leadership skills compared with their peers. A bit less than three in ten student leaders who reported *sometimes* talking about values and principles felt their leadership skills comparatively well-developed. More than six in ten student leaders who *often to very frequently* spoke about their values and principles felt their leadership skills were well-developed compared with their peers.

Let Your Values Guide You

Values influence every aspect of your life: your moral judgments; your responses to others; your commitments to your family, friends, school, and community; and your personal goals. Values set the boundaries for the hundreds of decisions and choices you make every day, consciously and subconsciously. And believe us: you make hundreds of decisions every day. Usually, people only consider choices that are within their value system. But sometimes, a "whatever" attitude kicks in, and you make poor choices. The question is, can you recognize when that attitude is kicking in? Can you stop yourself from giving in to it and instead listen to your inner voice that knows "this doesn't feel right"? The best chances of this happening are when your internal voice is loud and clear.

Values constitute your personal “bottom line.” They serve as guides to the actions you take. They inform the priorities you set and the decisions you make. They tell you when to say yes and when to say no. They also help you explain the decisions you make and why you made them. If you believe, for instance, that diversity makes things better, then you should know what to do if people with differing views keep getting cut off when they offer up fresh ideas. If you value working together over individual achievement, then you’ll know what to do when your teammate goes for the shot and ignores the better pass. If you value independence and initiative over conformity and obedience, you’ll be more likely to challenge what a good friend or someone of authority says if you think it’s wrong. All of the most critical decisions that you will make involve values. You will seldom consider or act on options that run counter to your value system. If you do, it’s generally with a sense of compliance rather than commitment.

Alan Yap was hitting a wall trying to balance all his interests—and not making the most of any of them—until he took time to think deeply about his values. Doing so helped clarify his priorities, leading him to eliminate some activities and commit more fully to others. For example, he decided to run for a leadership position in the business fraternity Alpha Kappa Psi. Upon being elected, Alan said he struggled to find an approach to leading the organization. He had to find his voice and figure out, “How do I want to be known as a leader?” He decided “that the best way to lead was through what I valued.” Alan’s experience illustrates how values are the signposts in your leadership journey. They supply you with a compass by which to navigate the course of your daily life. Clarity of values is essential to know which way is north, south, east, and west. The clearer you are about your values, the easier it is for you and for everyone else in your group to stay on the chosen path and commit to it. This kind of guidance is especially needed in difficult and uncertain times. When there are daily challenges that can throw you off course, it’s crucial that you have some signs that tell you where you are and direct you back on the path.

Sophia Bloom identified her personal values early in her life; growing up, she said her family modeled a passion for social justice. But growing up with someone else's values doesn't necessarily mean they are your own. In high school and college, Sophia began throwing herself into social justice work—for example, participating in and starting clubs and movements on campus, like a food bank and an anti-rape education organization. “I realized I tend to feel happiest when I feel like I'm doing something worthwhile and making the world closer to the way I want it to be,” Sophia said.

With her values as a guide, Sophia consciously pursued unique opportunities through her university to find ways to develop her capacity to make the difference she craved. For example, she interned at the United Nations, where she thought she might want to work someday in either easing and eradicating poverty globally or in advocating for women's rights. Sophia completed a summer internship in Barcelona, Spain, that worked with local hotels, hostels, and apartments to provide housing for homeless people. Once people were housed, the organization also worked to do empowerment-based training on job skills and functional life skills. Besides this internship, Sophia joined her school's International Scholars program to focus more on learning how to be a better global citizen and engaging in international community work.

By identifying the issues about which she felt most passionate, Sophia was able to find opportunities that could further her skill set and move her toward her ultimate goal of making a difference in the world. Sophia had this to say about how having a strong grasp on her values helped guide her in the opportunities she seeks out:

I think because it's what I like doing the most, I'm naturally drawn to a lot of organizations where I feel like I'm hopefully making a difference. I feel like my life, personally, is really great, and I'm really lucky to have been born into the life I was born into it—but it was very much luck. If I'd happened

to be born in a different place, I wouldn't have had all the opportunities that I'd been given. I feel like it's really important to me to help other people be able to have any opportunities that they would want. But I think the world would be a better, happier place if that happened—and it would make me happier if the world was like that, too.

Personal values drive commitment. Clear personal values drive motivation and productivity. People who are very clear about their values are more likely to stick around and work harder than those who don't have an internal compass to guide them through uncertainty. It's how you determine if the work you are doing, the group or organization you are in, fits you. You won't stick around (a place, a project, or a team) when you feel in your heart and soul that you don't belong. This is a major reason some people don't stay long in groups they've joined. Commitment is based on alignment with personal values. People who are clearest about personal values are better prepared to make choices based on principle—including deciding whether the principles of the organization fit with their own.

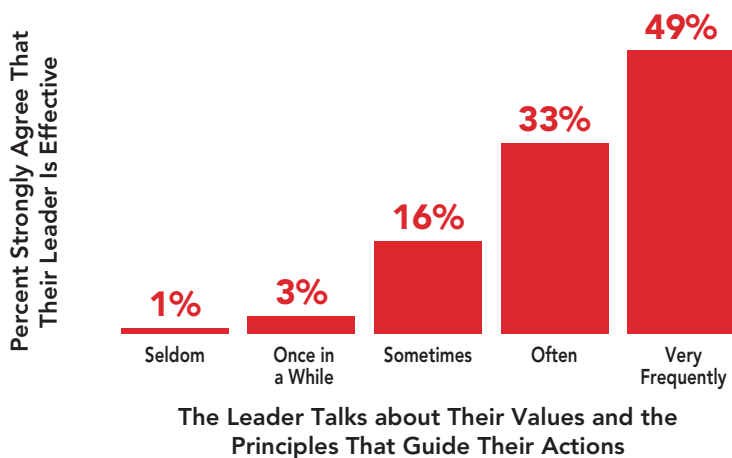
It is also true that the most effective student leaders “talk about their values and the principles that guide their actions.” Consider the fact that four out of five students evaluate their leader as effective when they are seen as *often* or *very frequently* talking about their values and principles, as shown in Figure 1.1.

Say It in Your Own Words

People can only speak the truth when speaking in their own true voice. If you only mimic what others say, people are unlikely to commit to you because they don't know who you are and what you believe in.

The techniques and tools that fill the pages of leadership books—including this one—are not substitutes for knowing what matters to

Figure 1.1 Effective leaders talk about the values and principles guiding their actions.



you. Once you have the words you want to say, you must also give voice to those words. You must be able to express yourself so that everyone knows that you are the one who's speaking and not someone else.

You'll find much scientific and empirical data to support the importance of each of The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership. However, remember that leadership is also an art, and just as with any other art form—whether it's painting, music, dancing, acting, or writing—leadership is a means of personal expression. To become a credible leader, you have to learn to express yourself in ways that are uniquely your own. Jacob Philpott provides a helpful example.

After his first year in college, Jacob applied for a residential advisor (RA) position for the Upward Bound Program (UB). UB is a federally funded educational program created for high school students from diverse, low-income families who are the first generation to go to college. Jacob had participated in the program as a high school student. When asked during the interview process why he wanted to work in

the program, he answered from his own experience: “My experience was so enriching I knew I wanted to come back and serve as an RA. I wanted to help prepare the participants for college and provide them with an even better experience than my own while working on a great team.”

Jacob’s motivation, he told us, was “heavily tied to my core values.” Being clear about your values helps you find your voice and be able to express yourself in your own unique way. Genuineness comes through when you can hear yourself using language and words that are your own rather than someone else’s. For example, Jacob found that on the very first day of the program:

I was given an opportunity to find my voice. We got everyone together for an introduction and to discuss our goals. I took that opportunity to share a story about my experience in the program, the values I learned, and the skills that were reinforced which helped me get through college.

All the participants had a chance to share their stories. Although each of these stories was unique to its teller, they carried common themes around building connections with people, growing, learning, and stepping outside one’s comfort zone. “I had clarified my values and found my voice,” said Jacob, “which enabled me to share my story and gave others the courage to share their own stories. The common values that came from this experience guided us through the rest of the program.”

When a close friend and sorority sister of Bella Rovere passed away in an accident just a few weeks into Bella’s tenure on her university’s student government, she was faced with a tough choice. As one of the few people in student government who knew the young woman who had passed away, Bella could take the lead and release a statement about her friend’s death—which had garnered significant attention

from the news media—or she could let another member of the leadership team handle it while Bella grieved.

Bella decided she wanted to be the one to handle it—that it was important to her as both a leader and a friend to make sure she acted to offer a statement from the heart. Bella realized that having someone else speak about her friend wouldn't have felt right. She had known her friend well, and she was in the unique position of having held multiple leadership positions on this southeastern university campus that would inform her thoughts on what the institution should do in the wake of the tragedy: "What am I going to do as a leader to honor my friend? I have a position that will allow me to do something—I need to be the one to do it."

Bella spent days drafting a statement about her friend's death. She pledged to work with her campus to improve safety measures, including hosting student focus groups to discuss what they felt the campus needed to do to improve safety.

It was a very odd leadership turning point because no one would have blamed me if I had opted not to be the one to handle it. But I thought to myself: Did I want someone else to handle this? Or did I feel confident enough in myself as a leader—and in my knowledge of what my friend would have wanted—to step up to the best of my ability? It was hard to find the right words—to know what I should say—but I'm so glad I did it.

Like Jacob and Bella, you cannot lead out of someone else's values or words. You cannot lead out of someone else's experience. You can only lead out from your own. Unless it's your style, your manner, your words, it's not you—it's just an act. People don't follow your title or your technique. They follow *you*. If you're not the genuine article, can you honestly expect others to want to follow? To be a leader, you

have to awaken to the fact that you don't have to copy someone else, you don't have to read a script written by someone else, and you don't have to imitate someone else's style. Instead, you are free to choose what you want to express and how you want to express it. You have a responsibility to others to express yourself authentically in a way they would immediately recognize as yours.

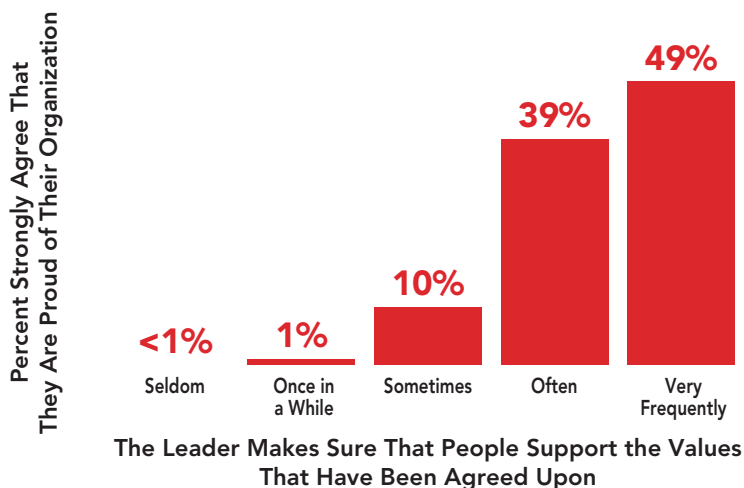
AFFIRM SHARED VALUES

Leadership is not solely about *your* values. It's also about the values of those you lead. Just as your values drive your commitment, the personal values of those you work with drive their commitment to the organization, club, or team. They will be significantly more engaged when staying faithful to their beliefs. Although clarifying your values is essential, understanding the values of others and building alignment around values everyone can share is equally critical.

Our research shows that the frequency with which their leader “makes sure that people support the values that have been agreed upon” influences the extent that people are proud to tell others they are working with this leader, as shown in Figure 1.2. Very few people strongly agree with this sentiment when they indicate that their leader *sometimes*, at best, engages in this behavior. Nearly nine in ten people strongly agree that they are proud to be associated with a leader who *often* or *very frequently* makes sure that people support the shared values.

Bethany Fristad felt there was something important inside her pushing to come out. In high school, she hadn't been very involved, felt little sense of purpose, and didn't think she had much direction in life. Halfway through her first year in college, something began to change. As she made friends at her new school and around the local small-town community, she started recognizing that she could serve a

Figure 1.2 People are most proud to work with leaders who affirm shared values.



greater purpose. She brought together a small group of classmates who helped establish a nonprofit organization focused on helping underprivileged children. They called it Fireflies to symbolize its ability to ignite a fire in people's hearts and eyes. Bethany then recruited an even larger group interested in helping children in need.

Fireflies members believe that underserved children can flourish in an environment where they can find their voices through music, sports, arts, books, and crafts. The group promoted this belief by collecting enough resources to travel to Sierra Leone and start the first of what Bethany calls Creation Nations, which are essentially playrooms where children explore their creative side with all sorts of arts, crafts, and music.

By giving voice to her convictions, Bethany found many supportive and willing participants who shared her beliefs about how to help children do well and who saw the value in what she wanted to do.

Had she not been clear on what she was trying to accomplish and why, particularly in such a new and large endeavor, others could have easily cast aside her ideas as impractical. Bethany persisted and appealed to the ideals she believed others shared about the need to help those less fortunate. She knew that the people she spoke with understood the value of creativity in helping children discover their dreams. Ultimately, she said, it was relatively easy to help fellow students see how they could transform their values into specific actions that would benefit others.

Shared values are the foundation for building productive and genuine working relationships. Exemplary student leaders, like Bethany, honor the uniqueness and individuality of everyone in the group, and they also stress common values. They don't try to get everyone to be in accord with everything. That goal is unrealistic, perhaps even impossible. Moreover, achieving it would negate the real advantages of diversity.

Nevertheless, leaders build on finding agreement because to take the first step, and then a second, and then a third, people must have some common core of understanding. After all, if there's no agreement about values, then what exactly are the leader and everyone else going to model? If disagreements over fundamental values continue, the result is intense conflict, false expectations, and diminished capacity.¹ Leaders ensure that through affirming shared values, everyone is aligned—uncovering, reinforcing, and holding one another accountable to what “we” value. Once people are clear about the leader's values, their own, and the shared values, they know what's expected of them and can count on others.

Give People Reasons to Care

Although it's vital that leaders forthrightly articulate the principles for which they stand, the values leaders espouse must be consistent with

the aspirations of those who follow them. Leaders who advocate values that aren't representative of the group won't be able to get people to act as one. There must be a shared understanding of mutual expectations. Leaders must gain consensus on a common cause and a common set of principles. They must be able to maintain a community of shared values. In this way, a leader's promise is also an organization's promise, regardless of whether the organization is a project team of two, an intramural slow-pitch softball team of ten, a fraternity of one hundred, a campus of seven thousand, a company of twenty thousand, or a town of two hundred thousand. Unless there's agreement about which promises to keep, the organization, its members, and its leaders risk losing credibility.

Recognition of shared values provides people with a common language. That unity generates tremendous energy when individual, group, and organizational values are in sync. Commitment, enthusiasm, and drive intensify. People have reasons for caring about what they are doing. When individuals care deeply about what they are doing, they are more effective and satisfied. They stay committed to the group, are more engaged in what's going on, and are more likely to participate actively. They experience less frustration with the task or the group.

Exemplary student leaders spend time talking about values with the people in their group. Too few groups in classrooms and teams devote enough time doing this. Too often it happens as a one-time occurrence, at the beginning of the school year, when a group is first formed, or new members are brought in. Frequent and continuing conversations reminding people why they care about what they are doing renew commitment and help people feel connected and part of the same team.

Having frequent and ongoing conversations with the people in your group reinforces what is important to the group and the specific individuals in it. Think about a time when you joined an organization as a new member. Did anyone talk to you about what the group stood

for? Did you ask the question, “What is important to this group?” If you did, was the answer very clear? If you didn’t, how did you know what the group was all about? The group’s values will guide everything it does, so it is essential to spend time regularly talking about those values. We know this can be initially challenging for any leader.

Consider Kara Koser’s experience as a resident assistant (RA) at a major urban university, trying to figure out how she could best meet the needs of her diverse resident population. She was unsure about proposing any activity that would be of sufficient interest to everyone. She realized that first, she had to listen to her inner voice and then take the time to listen to others. Kara understood that some people find it intimidating to talk about what is important to them, and it takes time for them to become comfortable sharing. Kara adopted an approach she called “leading out front and leading from the back.” What this meant to her was both sharing her viewpoints *and* intently listening to what others were saying, hearing firsthand what was important to them. “The difference in this type of leading was subtle,” Kara said, “but both approaches were important because they were done with the interests of the group—in my case, my floor residents—in mind.”

Kara continued having conversations with her residents about what they needed and wanted. The more they talked, the more they became comfortable sharing. Kara regularly worked to create an environment where people could freely and easily contribute. She encouraged her residents to speak out, knowing that the best solution for all would emerge if she could be respectful of the values of others while at the same time not minimizing her voice. These conversations enabled the residents to develop a greater sense of community and discover their shared values as they got to know each other better and how they wanted to spend their time together.

In another context, consider Grant Hillestad’s experience when he joined an organization called Students Today Leaders Forever (STLF), and soon found himself on a “Pay It Forward Tour,” one of STLF’s

community service road trips that go from city to city doing different service projects. Students travel on a chartered bus to visit cities large and small to learn about a variety of social issues; the idea is that in the process they will discover more about themselves, their own community, and the world.

In arranging their first road trip, Grant said that the group's planning for each city had been assigned to different people in order for them to learn and grow from the experience. Even though they were nervous that not enough preparations had been made in some locations, they had to let it play out because the organization valued learning by doing so deeply. "We were really worried that we'd get to a certain city and nothing would be ready," Grant said. "If that happened the whole trip might be remembered for that aspect of the event. It really took a lot for us to say, 'No, our mission is to *reveal* leadership through service. We have to trust that it will work out and that each of us will learn how to make it work out, not just a select few.'"

Grant's and Kara's experiences illustrate that you have to tap into the values of those you are working and interacting with. People become more committed when they can find alignment between their values and those of the group. The quality and accuracy of communication within the group, along with the integrity of the decision-making process, increase when people feel part of a team with the same values. Confidence in one another grows; stress and worry are reduced. People work harder and are more creative because they become fully engaged in what they are doing.

Forge Unity, Don't Force It

When leaders seek consensus around shared values, those who follow them are more positive and productive. You cannot mandate unity; instead, you forge it by involving people in the process, ensuring that they feel you are genuinely interested in their perspectives and that

they can speak freely with you. To be open to sharing their ideas and aspirations, others must believe you'll be caring and constructive in searching for common ground.

By encouraging ongoing discussion about the group's common values, leaders avoid the pitfall of people wasting time and energy trying to figure out what they're supposed to do. When people are unsure about their roles, they tend to lose focus or draw the group off-topic; they may stop participating or even leave the group altogether. The energy that goes into dealing with incompatible values, through arguments or misunderstandings, takes its toll on both the leader's effectiveness and the group's engagement. "What are our core principles?" and "What do we believe in?" are far from simple questions. Even with commonly identified values, there may be little agreement on the meaning of values statements. For example, one study reported 185 different behavioral expectations about the value of integrity alone.²

Yi Song told us about one of her class projects at a Chinese university, where she was randomly assigned to a team of people she did not know. Judging from their introductions to one another, Song felt that they had few things in common. They didn't all have the same major, were from different states or countries, and had diverse hobbies and interests. Song suggested that they identify what they valued the most from this team: "Let's each grab a pen and paper and write down five characteristics that we see as most important for working together as a team." After they finished writing, they shared what they had written and the reasons they had chosen those values, along with examples showing why they were important. Song told us how this action and discussion affected her and the team:

Through the individual value-sharing process, we found some common characteristics—responsibility, punctuality, efficiency, good quality of work, and a sense of humor—and these shared values guided our actions for the rest of the semester.

It was a great way to integrate individual values into the group's shared values. Since the shared values were decided by our entire group, everyone understood them, felt like they fit in, and were more willing to follow the shared values.

As Song's experience demonstrates, shared values emerge from a process, not a pronouncement. Leaders can't impose their values on the group's members; instead, they must actively involve people in identifying shared values. Values ownership increases exponentially when leaders actively engage a broad range of people in their development. Shared values result from listening, appreciating, building consensus, and resolving conflicts. For people to understand the values and agree with them, they must participate in the process. Unity can never be forced.

Fervently shared values are much more than advertising slogans. They are strongly supported and broadly endorsed beliefs about what's important to the people who hold them. People must be able to enumerate the values and have common interpretations of how to practice those values. They must know what their values will look like in action and how their efforts directly contribute to the group's success. On Song's team, for example, *being a responsible team member* meant that each person would put in the best effort on all the work they were assigned to do. *Being punctual* meant not being late for team meetings, and thus, showing respect by not wasting their teammates' time.

Having everyone on the same page regarding values has many benefits. It ensures consistency in what the group says and what it does. The result is high individual credibility and an excellent reputation for the group, further preparing people to discuss values and expectations when recruiting, selecting, and orienting new members. Whenever new members join your group, whether at the beginning of a term or in the middle of the year, knowing what the group stands

for and talking openly about it helps everyone make more informed decisions about their engagement with the group. Having everyone aligned about shared values builds commitment and community, which is precisely what leaders ultimately hope to do as everyone pursues a common purpose.

REFLECT AND ACT: CLARIFY VALUES

The first step on the journey to exemplary leadership is clarifying your values—discovering those fundamental beliefs that will guide your decisions and actions along the path to success and significance. This becomes your leadership philosophy. That journey involves an exploration of your inner self, where your true voice resides. You must take yourself on this voyage because it's the only route to being a credible leader and because your personal values drive your commitment to the organization and the cause. You can't do what you say if you don't know what you believe. And you can't do what you say if you don't believe in what you're saying.

Although being clear about personal values is essential for all leaders, that by itself isn't good enough. Leaders don't just speak for themselves; they also speak for their followers. There must be agreement on the shared values that everyone will commit to upholding. Shared values give people reasons to care about what they do, which significantly and positively affect their work attitudes and performance. A common understanding of shared values emerges from a process, not a pronouncement; unity and commitment emerge through conversation and debate.

Student leaders must also hold themselves and others accountable to shared values—a topic explored more thoroughly in the next chapter.

Reflect

Model the Way begins with the commitment to *clarify values by finding your voice and affirming shared values*. What are the most important ideas or lessons about exemplary leadership that you learned from this chapter?

Here are some actions you can take to solidify your commitment to **Clarify Values**:

- Reflect on the values that guide your actions and be able to express what they mean in your own words.
- Ask others to describe why they choose to be involved in their current activities and organizations and why they care about them.
- Create opportunities for people to discuss individual values with others in the group.
- Ask the group to identify the shared values revealed in discussions of individual values.
- Find ways to make the shared values visible, which helps ensure that people adhere to them.
- Periodically review the group's shared values to make sure that they are still salient; adjust and reconfirm as necessary.
- Be clear about how you will communicate what the group stands for when someone new joins the group and ensure that others are on the same page.

Act

After you have reflected on what you learned, what you can improve, and the preceding suggestions, record your plan here for taking at least one action that will help you become a better leader:
