

CHAPTER ONE

UNLOCKING
YOUR
POTENTIAL
AND TURNING
PRINCIPLES
INTO PRACTICE

IT'S NOT
MAGIC... IT'S
A COMMITMENT

Each of the chapters of this book will include a section called 'Principles into Practice: Making it Real' that will include one or more of the following elements:

- *Scripts*: Structured formats with verbatim sections for navigating specific conversations and scenarios.
- *Tools*: Frameworks and checklists to guide decision-making and interaction in various leadership contexts.
- *Activities*: Hands-on exercises, reflections and assignments to apply and reinforce leadership concepts.
- *Commitments*: Actionable pledges to reinforce learning and encourage personal accountability.

Not every chapter will have all these elements, but each chapter will ask for at least one commitment and another aspect to explore, such as taking what you're reading, combining it with what you're thinking, and making it real.

This section is designed to unlock your potential by taking what you already know and what you are inspired to consider when reading this book to create and execute your own blueprint. Instead of having a story or concept to smile or reminisce over 12 months from now, I want tangible change to show for it.

It's worth outlining each of the elements in more detail, in part because it is the teaching approach I take especially in workplaces.

SCRIPTS

Scripts are structured, pre-planned conversational blueprints designed to guide specific types of dialogue with clarity and purpose. They include verbatim phrases or prompts to ensure the intent of the conversation is communicated effectively and consistently. Scripts serve as a scaffold for complex or emotionally charged discussions, offering leaders a tested pathway to navigate challenging interactions while focusing on the desired outcomes. They provide a foundation for confidence, clarity and skilful delivery. Importantly, scripts are adaptable and re-purposeful. With experience, you will find ways to add your own wrinkles to a script to make them more your own without losing any effectiveness. In addition, you will notice that with some simple modifications, scripts designed for one purpose can bring fantastic benefits in other contexts.

TOOLS

Tools are adaptable frameworks or structured guides designed to help leaders approach specific interactions or decisions with greater precision and insight, usually without prescribing exact wording. These may include checklists, step-by-step progressions, or strategic frameworks that outline considerations and best practices to follow. They also include simple behavioural techniques that enhance your ability to operate effectively. Tools are crafted to simplify complex processes, prevent common missteps, and enhance the effectiveness

of decision-making or communication. They empower leaders to achieve consistency and impact while fostering personal and organizational growth.

ACTIVITIES

Activities are experiential learning tasks that deepen understanding and drive reflection on key concepts. They can be thought-provoking questions, reflective journaling prompts, actionable exercises, or curated resources such as recommended readings or videos. Activities encourage leaders to apply insights to their unique contexts, engage in meaningful dialogue, or explore new perspectives through practice. These tasks are designed to build self-awareness, develop skills, and foster connection with others, embedding learning into everyday practice.

COMMITMENTS

Commitments offer a practical way to translate learning into meaningful action. Each chapter concludes with a discrete, manageable, yet stretching challenge that aligns with the chapter's themes. These commitment requests can be a simple sentence asking you to pick something from the chapter and deliver on the action or apply the learning. Don't mistake the simplicity of the request with comfort in making the commitment. These commitments inspire immediate action and longer-term growth, helping you solidify the insights they've gained.

Commitments can be divided into two types:

- *Process commitments* focus on how something is done, encouraging behavioural shifts, habit formation or refined approaches to recurring tasks or interactions.
- *Outcome commitments* aim for measurable or noticeable results, driving the reader towards goals or tangible endpoints reflecting real change.

By incorporating both types of commitments, you can develop a well-rounded approach to personal development, addressing both day-to-day behaviours and tangible building blocks for longer-term aspirations.

I encourage you to set clear deadlines for each commitment, whether to achieve a specific result or embed a new habit into your routine. By engaging with these challenges, you'll take ownership of your development, ensuring the concepts from each chapter move beyond reflection into purposeful, sustained change. You are not limited to one commitment per chapter, but it's better to complete one commitment for each chapter than find yourself with tens of incomplete commitments hanging over you as you read on. By all means, be zealous in your appetite for change and growth, but be pragmatic and kind in your approach.

Before we go any further, we will consider how we create a commitment. Without meaning to patronise, we often assume this is obvious and embedded. After all, most of us have tasks to complete and people who rely on us to do 'stuff' at home and work, so we've all got this, right?

In case you'd like a refresher, there's a science to making effective commitments. I want you to consider the following 'Tool' as a foundation for bringing about the effective personal and professional changes you want.

TOOL: THE KEY ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE COMMITMENTS

There are 13 key elements for making effective commitments:

1. Specificity and Clarity

- Define your commitment precisely, detailing your actions, when and how. For example, instead of committing to 'exercising more', pick an activity type, duration and number of days a week you plan to do the activity.
- Your commitment may require other actions. For example, I get up early, about 05:30, not for those ridiculous reasons some random 'alpha man' suggests but because I love to ride my bike. However, I don't love riding my bike in London at rush hour – so I get up early to facilitate my commitment to bike riding (and safety!)

2. Achievability and Incrementality

- As you set your mind on a commitment, you will find precursor actions, some of which are chunky enough to be commitments in their own right. Don't be afraid to separate them out and make them precursor commitments.

From my previous example, I might have committed to getting up earlier for two weeks before I followed up by getting up and getting on my bike for my first ride.

- Don't try to 'eat the elephant'. Break up larger goals into smaller, but still challenging and meaningful, chunks.
- Don't commit to someone else's version of you. However simple or easy to achieve, making commitments based on someone else's expectations or demands of you, especially absent any personal stake based on who you are and what you really want to achieve in the future, will either fail to happen or in success, feel hollow.

3. Personal Relevance

- Meaningfulness is important – while achieving a goal that isn't meaningful to you is possible, it's often more onerous and injurious in the process. You don't need to commit to doing something for the same reasons as others, but whatever reason you choose must speak – at least – to you. Find that reason, embrace it, and don't worry whether it 'resonates' with others as long as it compels you.
- Ensure commitments align with your values and longer-term aspirations. This might mean really considering your longer-term aspirations if you haven't already!
- Engage in personal reflection on the ongoing relevance of any commitment over time. Is it still serving you? Is it still congruent with your values and aspirations?

4. Public and Written Nature

- Written (and especially handwritten)¹ commitments make for stronger, more enduring behaviour change. So, whether you are a classic 'pen and moleskine notebook' person or, like me, for organisational purposes alone, you've shifted to Goodnotes or similar, I encourage you to write down, date and time stamp your commitments.

- The literature encourages public commitments to increase accountability² where commitments are concerned. It seems to me that this is more effective when the people you share your commitment with both care about you and you care what they think about you. Banging off a commitment tweet on Twitter (it will always be referred to as Twitter) to a mass of faceless followers will likely be less effective than curating an audience that will care about your declaration and want to be a part of your achieving it.
5. Voluntary Participation
 - I will make some suggestions about the nature and scope of commitments you might make, but I must allow you to choose your specific commitments freely. Otherwise, I risk dampening your intrinsic motivation³ and violating any number of these guidelines by making your commitment my commitment.
 6. Positive Framing
 - Frame commitments in terms of positive actions rather than restrictions.⁴ The way I speak and write often focuses on what something isn't before I describe what something is – this is a rhetorical habit rather than a reflection of my optimism or pessimism. However, where commitments are concerned, it is helpful to frame as much as possible, to present them as actions to embrace rather than restrictions to avoid. So it's not that you will 'not eat Nutella for every meal', but rather you 'will ensure that one meal per day contains green vegetables and a source of protein'.
 7. Accountability Mechanisms
 - Use tools like trackers or visual aids to monitor and display progress. This doesn't mean you must create a personal dashboard, but you will need to understand how you are

doing against your commitments. Some tracking will help you stay engaged, adjust your efforts and experience a sense of accomplishment as you progress against your commitment.⁵

- Sometimes, behavioural contracts that clearly outline responsibilities and consequences can be useful.⁶ You might already be doing this with little ‘deals’ you do with yourself – ‘If I eat a healthy breakfast and lunch, I can have a small slice of cheesecake with dinner!’ or ‘If I write another 5,000 words this afternoon, I can get a Chinese meal as a reward’ or ‘If I don’t finish my homework by 6pm, I can’t go to the party’.
- Accountability partners – find someone who is also questing for something important (it doesn’t need to be the same thing as you) to hold you accountable for your commitment. Bear in mind these are most powerful when reciprocal – when you are bound to monitor, support and challenge them to achieve their stated goals, as they are yours.

8. Social Support

- Find groups of people with similar sets of goals and embrace peer support networks to encourage follow-through. One such way is to join the LinkedIn group ‘Find Your Giant Community’, where you will find a diverse and wonderfully committed group of leaders and aspiring leaders from across the world and across sectors, ready to connect and support you.
- Some of you will be part of professional networks with some utility. For me, there are networks for the British Psychological Society (BPS), the Association for Business Psychologists (ABP), the Chartered Institute for Personnel

and Development (CIPD) and the Institute of Science and Technology (IST) that I find most supportive in my growth journey. However, I'm aware that not all of you will have networks that are so interested or engaged in your personal and professional growth. Find a network that will work for you.

9. Feedback and Evaluation

- From the moment you write your commitment, provide yourself with regular opportunities for self-reflection and progress assessment. I tend to do this by scheduling time in my diary to reflect on my success toward my goals.
- If you've engaged accountability buddies or have people close to you at work or home who are on their own development journey, offer and request mutual feedback sessions to review progress, adjust commitments, celebrate milestones and adjust goals as needed.

10. Intrinsic Motivation Focus

- Connect commitments with personal values and long-term aspirations. Everyone needs a 'why'. If it's hidden or unspoken, if it's euphemistic or a lie, your chances of engaging your intrinsic motivational resources are limited. Name your truth – be explicit and direct about why you want to do something. Even if that truth is 'I want to stick two fingers up to [insert name of the bad boss here]', that reality is going to engage your motivation more than something generic that's been mentally photoshopped for public acceptability, like 'I just want to help people'.
- There are techniques for personal compassion and motivation aligned with the practice of 'motivational interviewing' that could be useful to consider to maintain your

momentum. I discuss them in Chapter 6 in the context of helping colleagues and friends transform perceived weaknesses. When you get to that chapter, I will remind you that these techniques, supposedly for those we wish to lead or influence, can also be effectively deployed to support our own ambitions.

11. Tangibility and Noticeability

I'm a psychologist – I am fascinated by mindset and the mind – even now, I want to spin off a soliloquy about how little we understand about the mind, the mind/body paradox and, as I will discuss later in Chapter 4, how not all the voices in your head are you! Until then, remember that your commitments are enhanced when you:

- Focus on observable behaviours and actions rather than abstract concepts.
- Ensure commitments are noticeable, even when not measurable, so they can be easily sensed if not monitored by you and others.

For example, 'I will demonstrate my gratitude by thanking colleagues in specific ways related to a tangible contribution they make' is leagues ahead of 'I won't take my team for granted' as a commitment.

12. Time-Bound Nature

- Set clear timeframes for commitments to create urgency and facilitate evaluation. Remember 'What by when' as a mantra – you will achieve this specific outcome or habitual practice by a certain and specific date.
- Create an interim check-in point if an outcome or target date is over three weeks away.

13. Flexibility and Adaptability

- Allow for adjustments to commitments based on progress and changing circumstances. You are legitimately busy people with pulls on your time, drains to your energy and, for some of us, fires to fight on multiple fronts. In addition, we exist in a world of change and novel and unexpected events.
- The check-in points for your medium- to longer-term goals must incorporate amendment and reprioritisation of goals and targets.
- Avoid adaptations or extensions based on whim, frivolous desires or trivial distractions.
- Do not punish yourself for the adaptations you make or the extensions you allow yourself when they are borne of a tactical or strategic necessity.

Commitments are catalysts for personal and professional growth. They are the cornerstone of personal development, serving as discrete, manageable, yet challenging goals that readers set for themselves after completing each chapter. These commitments are designed to be both achievable and stretching, encouraging readers to push beyond their comfort zones and make tangible progress towards their goals.

Each chapter of this book introduces a new commitment, either building upon the previous ones or challenging ever-further change, to create a comprehensive framework for personal growth. I encourage you to set specific deadlines for completing or habituating each commitment, ensuring accountability and measurable progress. Don't forget; you don't have to do this alone – you aren't the only one reading this book or seeking ways to improve their leadership – there

are online fora, IRL group meetings, book clubs and other methods to find people to share your successes and anxieties on this journey. In my last book, *The Promises of Giants*, I encouraged you to create a ‘Cabinet’ of people to support and advise you. In this ever-fractured world, that still stands as good advice, but perhaps more than ever, we need to see more than a group we are familiar with to an inspiring Tribe of people, different in their own ways and bound not by politics or nationalism, but in their desire to become the leaders their communities, teams and organisations deserve.

Principles into Practice: Making it Real

Using the commitment framework, make a commitment about how you will read this book. You’ve got other priorities and demands on your time, so be practical, but:

- 1.** How often, when and for how long will you carve out time to read this book?
- 2.** With whom will you share your thoughts and reflections, and how often?
- 3.** Pick one personally important person to share your commitment and ask them to check in with you on your success regularly (perhaps monthly?). (This may or may not be the same person with whom you share your reflections.

If you are reading this book and don’t know anyone else doing the same, write down your commitment, following the commitment guidance.

(Continued)

Find a new notebook or digital folder to collect all your commitments, reflections and questions. If you have a physical copy of this book, feel free to write all over it and add Post-it notes as an alternative.

Good evidence shows that handwriting notes, reflections and commitments are more effective for memory and actually keeping commitments over time versus typing or just mulling your thoughts in your head.

While typing may be faster and more convenient in some situations, the evidence suggests that handwriting (whether digital or 'real')⁷ offers significant learning and memory benefits and personal goal-setting and commitment. Handwriting goals and plans may increase the likelihood of remembering and achieving them.

If you are part of a group or you know another person reading this book, you are going to do a 'digital pair and share' exercise with them:

- 1.** Write your commitment.
- 2.** Share your commitment with a partner who will check it to ensure the commitment guidance has been followed.
- 3.** Once checked, one person in a pair gets both phones with the photo app open and on the 'video' setting.
- 4.** They point both cameras at the other person, and when the other person is ready, they begin to record.
- 5.** When recording has begun, they speak their commitment.

- 6.** Both phones are swapped, and the process is repeated for the second person.
- 7.** You now both have a copy of your own and the other person's commitment on your phones.
- 8.** Mark these videos as "favourites" so that you can access them easily, and they will pop up as reminders occasionally.

This process can also be done on Teams, Zoom or another virtual messaging platform. The key is ensuring you both have a recording that encapsulates both commitments and that you set reminders to look them up on occasion so you can check your growth against your goals.

