



Small Acts of Leadership

By G. Shawn Hunter • Routledge 2016

Find more books at convenebooksummary.com

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

G. Shawn Hunter is an entrepreneur, best-selling author, and currently founder and president of Mindscaling, a company creating beautiful, intelligent online learning courses based on the works of best-selling authors.

The Summary

Introduction: Small Things Can Matter Most

This book is about doing little things that can lead to a big impact. Small, consistent efforts, practiced over time, can yield big results for you, and the people around you.

The reason New Year's resolutions fail is not because the goal is too great or the intention is misguided. It's because the discrepancy between where we are today and the envisioned future often appears so great that we cannot bridge the gap. If we resolve to spend five days a week at the gym, and we currently spend zero,

then the gap is so great that we cannot immediately and easily cross it.

This book is about small steps and tiny tweaks in how we treat ourselves, how we carry ourselves, and how we think about other people, and the world, that can change the way we think and behave.

Chapter 1: Believe in Yourself

The respect and regard we have for ourselves is our self-esteem. The strength of our belief in our abilities to accomplish our goals and achieve our potential is our self-efficacy. These are two different things, and without

self-efficacy, we are likely to fail in leading others. When we have a strong sense of self-efficacy, we make a greater commitment to our activities and can quickly recover from setbacks.

It's common to think that we have no idea what we're doing and that those around us have a better handle on the situation and are more competent. But that's often not the case—often everyone is in the same boat, looking for a captain. By believing in ourselves, we can become that leader.

Surprisingly, it's not always the fear of failure that keeps us from acting but rather the fear of success. We ask ourselves, if we succeed, will others have higher expectations that we can't fulfill? Will we be able to top our last success? When life comes at us hard, do we panic or do we thrive?

When life is hard and options seem slim, letting go and embracing optimism can save us and put us on the right track. By avoiding panic and giving our minds some space to work, it's amazing what we can accomplish, and how we can come to our rescue. When we believe in ourselves, we find it easier to be true to our values and live authentically instead of trying to be who we think others want us to be.

It's human nature to compare ourselves with others. In any given situation, we often look around and make comparisons. And these comparisons can make us feel inadequate. We know that the less we focus on comparisons, the happier we will feel about ourselves, but we still can't help it. Social media doesn't help either. We all get to see the happier, more beautiful side of successful people online.

When I feel doubt, I remind myself: you do deserve to be here. It wasn't luck, it was your hard work. Strive for more. And stop comparing—it's self-defeating. Instead, start by trying to be the person you would like to work for. It's kind of like trying to live up to, and become, the person your dog already thinks you are.

Chapter 2: Build Confidence

Like art, we know confidence when we see it, and we know when we feel it. The thing is, confidence can't be summoned on demand from the heavens. Confidence isn't brought on by clenching our fists. So how do we achieve and sustain it?

Let's start by taking a look at the sources of True Confidence:

1. Preparation

Being prepared can give any of us confidence whether in the sports field, on the stage, or at a workplace meeting. Preparation leads to competence, which in turn begets confidence.

2. Visualization

Recollecting positive performances in the past can give us a confidence advantage. When we take a moment to recall a time in which we were previously successful, we feel a sense of confidence that we can repeat that success.

3. Great Coaching

Good coaches can instill confidence in many ways, but the greatest coaches are honest, specific, and positive, all at the same time. They're honest in that they don't ignore the weaknesses of the people they coach but instead provide advice that is both specific and positive.

4. Innate Advantages

We're more likely to be confident if our team is bigger, faster, and stronger. Any team in a company that simply has more capacity and resources than the competition will likely enter proposal negotiations with more confidence.

5. Competitive Advantages

Recognizing the advantages we have over our competitors is a valuable source of confidence. When we know we have a better chance at success compared to others, we will feel a boost of confidence.

6. Self-Awareness

Contrary to the old wisdom of using positive self-talk, such as “I think I can” to boost self-confidence, using questions is much more powerful. If we ask ourselves, “Can I do this?” we’ll have to answer it in our minds and be specific about how we will meet the challenge.

Confidence is not an inherent personality trait, but rather a skill that can be developed. By working on each of these sources of confidence, we can gradually build the confidence needed to face big challenges in life.

The core takeaway here is that confidence grows through action. Instead of waiting to be fully prepared, start taking small steps that will lead to greater competence and self-assurance over time. Each step will build momentum, creating a cycle where taking action breeds more confidence.

Chapter 3: Introduce Challenge

Great leaders challenge their teams and colleagues to step outside their comfort zones. By introducing challenges, leaders can push others to stretch their skills, think more creatively, and discover new potential among themselves. When people face obstacles or new objectives, they’re forced to come up with creative solutions and ways to tackle the situation. While problems and obstacles might be uncomfortable, discomfort often leads to growth, so it is a price worth paying.

To maintain a challenging environment, we, as leaders, have to be on guard against complacency, an innovation killer. We also need to make all our team members feel valued and trusted to make the team successful.

And that means embracing failure when it occurs in the face of meeting new challenges and trying new solutions. We should treat failure not as a character flaw but rather as a character builder. Great leaders embrace failure as a necessary part of growth and encourage their teammates to fail spectacularly because each failure offers a valuable lesson that will contribute to future success.

To achieve this, it is essential to reflect after each failure. Learning from your mistakes means gaining insights that you can apply to improve your approach next time.

Moreover, leaders need to be transparent about their failures. By openly sharing their experiences, they can build trust within their teams. When leaders admit their own mistakes, they set an example for others to take risks without the fear of getting judged.

Lastly, many successful leaders faced numerous failures before they became successful. The key here is persistence. Keep taking risks, even if you face failure after failure. That way, you increase your chances of eventual success.

Chapter 4: Express Gratitude

While meeting challenges is valuable in building character, we also need to reward that effort. Expressing gratitude for good work is critical for trust and well-being in ourselves and our teams.

Expressing Gratitude is not just a kind gesture. It’s also an essential leadership practice that strengthens relationships, boosts team morale, and can enhance performance. As leaders, we need to be authentic and timely in our expression of thanks to our teammates. This way, we can create a culture of appreciation that everyone benefits from. When leaders show appreciation for the efforts of their team members, they feel a sense of mutual respect and trust. Acknowledging someone’s hard work or contribution makes them feel

valued and recognized. This doesn't just result in increased motivation but also better job satisfaction among team members. People who feel appreciated are more likely to go above and beyond their roles.

Gratitude doesn't mean just saying "thanks." To show gratitude in a meaningful way, we must understand what drives our need for it, and what drives us in our work and the rest of our lives. It's not money that drives most workers; it's being able to do meaningful work, being challenged, and being appreciated. And while we all want to find meaning in our work, we also want to have fun. Having a sense of humor and encouraging others to express theirs can be a form of gratitude that helps build cohesion in the workplace and encourages everyone to strive for greater achievement.

Chapter 5: Fuel Curiosity

Challenge and curiosity go hand in hand. Firing both up in the workplace paves the road to innovation and to happy, productive teams that are more likely to reach their potential for success. It's easy to settle into thinking everything is on track, but is what we're seeing just an illusion?

We shouldn't be afraid to challenge assumptions made within our organization and be relentlessly, assertively curious, not letting ourselves or others dampen our quest for answers. We should also inspire curiosity in others and avoid complacency. The results can be surprising—and highly productive.

You can sport a real expert versus a phony. Look for three little words: "I don't know." Phonies will have all the answers, while experts will be willing to admit what they don't know. Real experts are relentlessly curious, even assertively curious—that is, they will demand explanations for things that many others simply accept as rules.

Creativity consistently ranks among the most sought-after and valued characteristics of workers today. Executives know that the next killer app, product, or service is going to come from relentlessly curious and creative people. Hence, the most desirable professionals today are happy, collaborative, and have hustle, but above all, they are relentlessly curious and creative.

In a September 2015 study, the pharmaceutical company Merck surveyed more than 2600 people on the value of creativity in the workplace and how the company encouraged (or hindered) creative practices. While a staggering 90 percent agreed that the best ideas came out of persistent and curious behavior, including constantly questioning company practices, fewer than 25 percent of those working today described themselves as curious people.

We are more likely to call ourselves "organized" "diligent" or even "friendly" than to call ourselves "creative." If anything, creativity is becoming even more scarce in this highly demanding work environment.

Here's an interesting fact about people who describe themselves as curious and creative: these people are also assertive. Curious people are decision-makers. They are influencers. If you think of the people in your company and community who consistently drive change, I bet you'll be thinking of inquisitive people—people willing to ask hard questions.

That may seem counterintuitive. After all, if we're busy questioning the world around us, aren't we in a listening and receptive mode, and not in a decision, action-taking mode? But these two behaviors—deeply questioning and then taking action—reinforce levels of creative engagement. This is because highly creative people also tend to be fearlessly persistent. They often describe themselves as "adventurous" and "risk-taking."

Chapter 6: Grant Autonomy

Most people don't like someone always looking over their shoulder or second-guessing them. While it's good to help our teams build their confidence and meet challenges, it's also important to let them loose to explore and try their ideas on their own. When we feel like we own much of what we do, we tend to take responsibility and love our work. And when we love our work, we learn faster.

Real learning rarely comes from success. It's the failures that force us to ponder the details of what we do, to understand the things and processes we work with. Failure can also spur us to try and try again to actualize our ideas. The same is true when, as teammates or bosses, we allow others to fail. If we believe in our team and help them believe in themselves. We should also be confident that they'll learn from their experimentation and go on to successes that may even be greater than we hoped for.

Too often, hiring managers and recruiters brag about only hiring the best and the brightest from the top schools, but then won't give them the latitude to make even the most mundane decisions on their own.

In a November 2015 interview, Bashar Nejdawi, executive VP of Ingram Micro, told me that sometimes he knows a project or initiative of a junior team will fail. He has the experience and the insight to recognize that it's likely to bomb, but he lets it fold anyway. He believes that, as long as it's not a mission-critical failure, it's more important to let people go through the learning experience themselves. They need to have the experience of understanding firsthand that a particular process or initiative won't work. He understood that at some point we have to let go of those we manage and that the benefits of granting autonomy can yield big results in terms of company success.

Chapter 7: Strive for Authenticity

On a scale of one to ten, how true are the following statements about yourself at work?

- "I feel out of tune with my coworkers."
- "I lack companionship at my work."
- "There is no one I can turn to in this organization."
- "I feel left out."
- "I don't feel like I can talk honestly with anyone in this company."

These were among the questions researchers asked 786 professionals and their bosses to help determine their sense of loneliness in the organizational culture and then to correlate that result with their current job performance.

Recent studies show that a little more than half of us, at one time or another, experience periods of intense loneliness in our professional lives. Loneliness is not depression, shyness, or poor social skills, and it certainly isn't introversion. It's more a feeling of estrangement, of alienation—a sense of not belonging to a place or a culture. And the implications of having lonely people at work are big. Our sense of belonging on a team has a direct effect on our commitment to a task, sense of role clarity, and collaborative effectiveness.

We may find it a struggle to fit in while remaining true to ourselves—to be authentic—but hiding from who we are can alienate us not only from those we work with but also from ourselves.

To be of the greatest value to ourselves, our teams, our families, and the world at large, we must instead strive to be who we are, share what we feel is the best of us, and manage, rather than conceal, our foibles. Forcing people into conformity has a high cost, as diversity of ideas is one of the greatest catalysts to innovation and

a sense of self-worth. While building inclusion in the workplace can be a challenge, some simple actions can move us and others in the right direction.

Oftentimes, we put pressure on ourselves to act in ways inconsistent with who we truly are, for the sake of others or out of fear of being ostracized. But sometimes it's those around us who, intentionally or not, and often for apparently good reasons, pressure us to be inauthentic.

It's quite common for people to conceal parts of their identity for fear of being stigmatized. At work, people often hide their religion, political values, health conditions, and maybe their preference for cross-dressing. People even conceal what might seem to be quite benign things, such as parental obligations to fetch a sick child from school or take them to a dentist appointment—all out of fear of being branded as not professional, not dedicated, or most importantly, not like everyone else at work. It's an effort to get along, to be part of the group, to fit in.

The fear is that, if our true identities are known, we'll be stigmatized, and possibly judged by people at work. Understandably, no one wants to feel rejected. The interesting thing about this expectation is that it's completely unfounded, according to a fascinating study from Yale. In the study, researchers found that overwhelmingly, people believed and expected that concealing parts of their identity that were unique or counter to the prevailing culture would make them feel a higher sense of belonging to the group, and in turn, the group would be more welcoming and more inclusive to those who look and act like everyone else.

The study showed that the opposite is true: when we conceal parts of our identity that are core truths about who we are, we start to retract from homogeneous groups. And when we socially withdraw from a group, people around us sense it and begin to reciprocate. It's a reinforcing cycle.

If we want to feel like we belong where we work, we need to care more about the work we do. To bring out the best in people, we need a culture that not only allows but actively encourages, the expression of self, of who we are. And the very best leaders understand this by creating an environment of inclusiveness and acceptance, because those fundamentals of social acceptance, and assuming the best in others are the building blocks for accelerating innovation.

Chapter 8: Be Fully Present

While leadership requires a lot of action, sometimes it means simply showing up and being fully present.

Being fully present means listening intently, being aware of ourselves in each moment, and being aware of our colleagues' moods and dispositions. It also means focusing on the task at hand and ignoring distractions. Focusing on that task not only helps get the work done, it also helps us know the limits of what can be done and when our team is on the wrong track.

One way to be fully present is through mindfulness. Mindfulness is accessible to everyone. It's not a mystical, elusive experience, and it's not necessarily meditation, but rather an intentional technique that has value for all of us in our increasingly hectic everyday lives. We are always racing from here to there—racing in our relationships, and racing in our work. For decades people have tried to do everything faster, even reading faster in vain attempts to absorb information faster. But a growing body of evidence suggests that the path to heightened comprehension and immersive learning is by reading slower, not faster. The same is true for other things in life as well. Greater comprehension of the things around us comes from slowing down and actively noticing.

Mindfulness isn't a tiring exertion. When practiced thoughtfully, it's a relaxing and absorbing activity that

makes us feel renewed and energized. Mindfulness is about being able to integrate various disparate parts of our lives into a unified whole. This integrated, holistic notion of mindfulness dispels the antiquated philosophies of work-life balance as if these were two separate lives that needed to be in harmony. Instead, mindfulness teaches us to understand our lives as an integrated whole.

Stress is not a function of an event itself—it's merely our emotional reaction to it, a function of the perspective we take. The event itself is impersonal—neither positive nor negative. When we apply mindfulness, we begin to understand that instead of simply reacting to events, we can *respond* to them in a more meaningful way.

For example, let's say our team has a big product launch, and in the first quarter that product bombs. No one buys it. If our team views that as purely a negative event, everything involved in it becomes seen as bad—the product itself, our team's performance, etc. But if we can take a step back and impartially examine all the circumstances of the event—for example, the market dynamics, customer buying habits, product placement, or interface design—we can mindfully explore and then change the situation to create a more desired outcome.

Chapter 9: Inspire Others

One of the greatest predictors of effectiveness, happiness, and success in work is our capacity to inspire others. As Canadian researchers Val Kinjerski and Berna J. Skrypnek found in studying the effect of inspiration in the workplace, “Inspired leadership emerged as central to influencing individual experiences of spirit at work”. It was also “strongly linked” to a sturdy organizational foundation, organizational integrity, a positive workplace culture and space, a sense of community among members, opportunities for personal fulfillment, continuous learning and development, and appreciation and regard for employees and their contributions.

Inspiration is rooted in passion, curiosity, and our desire to live our lives to the fullest. To inspire, we must be inspired, and to be inspired, we have to take time to notice the small acts of leadership readily available in any situation. There's nothing quite so inspiring as seeing someone embrace his work in the pursuit of excellence or service of a greater mission. There's nothing quite so moving as witnessing small acts of excellence, generosity, and kindness.

Slydial is the app that lets you go straight to voicemail, safe from the possibility that someone might answer your call. Maybe some people use it because they don't have the time for a conversation, but many feel the need to use it because of the energy vampires in the world—those people you dread talking to because they leave you depleted, bummed out, frustrated, or annoyed with every conversation. However hopeful you remain, they will figure out how to suck the energy from the conversation.

Being an energy vampire is antithetical to being a source of inspiration. To avoid being an energy vampire, we should ask ourselves, “When people leave an interaction with me, do they feel more or less energized?”

How important is being able to energize those around us? According to Rob Cross, associate professor at the University of Virginia, our ability to create energy in the workplace, with our colleagues around us, is a more powerful predictor of our success than other criteria, including expertise, seniority, knowledge, and intelligence. These are all descriptors. Creating energy is a behavior that can be learned. The ability to generate energy in those around us is so important that many successful executives and leaders place it at the top of the list as the most important attribute in team members.

Chapter 10: Clarify Roles

History is littered with disasters that came about because the wrong person was in charge at the wrong time, or because who should be in charge was unclear. Sometimes these disasters occurred through miscommunication, and sometimes because leaders neglected their roles.

The key to a beautifully crafted machine is that every part works, and is in the right place—in the role it fits. The same is true of teams in the workplace. Confusion about roles in a team leads to inefficiency, frustration, and reduced morale. When team members are unsure about their responsibilities or overlap in tasks occurs, it can create friction and hinder optimal progress. As leaders, we need to ensure that everyone knows exactly what they're accountable for, which will lead to smoother collaboration and better outcomes for the team.

Another problem that arises from unclear roles is a lack of accountability. When roles are well-defined, team members understand what they need to deliver, and they can be held accountable for their performance. The lack of role clarity, on the other hand, leads to finger-pointing or missed deadlines because no one knows who is truly responsible.

When roles are clearly defined, people can focus on their tasks without worrying about stepping on each other's toes or duplicating efforts. Well-defined roles can prevent overlapping responsibilities, which can save time and resources and improve team efficiency.

When assigning roles, leaders should take into account each team member's strengths. When people are placed in roles that match their skills, experience, and talents, they're more likely to thrive and produce high-quality work. This is why a leader needs to get to know their team member's strengths and assign roles accordingly to maximize their performance.

Having clear roles in a team doesn't mean people have to work in isolation. Defining roles is a way to enhance collaboration. When everyone knows what they're responsible for, it becomes much easier to coordinate efforts and collaborate effectively. Each member knows where their responsibilities end and where others begin, which creates a more collaborative, rather than competitive, environment.

Clarifying roles involves more than just assigning tasks, it requires clear communication about what success looks like in each role. Leaders need to ensure that team members not only understand their tasks but also how their performance will be measured and how their role fits into the larger organizational goals. This will allow team members to prioritize their work and understand the impact of their contributions towards a shared goal.

Lastly, leaders should make sure that assigned roles are not static. As teams evolve, projects change, and organizational needs shift, roles need to be reassessed and adjusted accordingly. Regular check-ins and discussions about role clarity can help ensure that everyone stays aligned with the current objectives and that there aren't any emerging gaps or overlaps in responsibilities.

Chapter 11: Defy Convention

The term "deviance" has long been associated with behavior that is harmful, dangerous, or perhaps immoral, such as lying, cheating, stealing, and other dishonorable acts. But sometimes bucking the norm in a positive way—positive deviance—may be more honorable behavior.

"Positive deviance focuses on those extreme cases of excellence when organizations and their members break free from the constraints of norms to conduct honorable behaviors," writes Professor Gretchen Spreitzer of the University of Michigan.

Positive deviance is the kind of behavior that, when recognized by others, should be commended and praised. It refers to actions that, although outside and even disruptive of the norm, have honorable intentions and positive outcomes.

Following conventional wisdom can sometimes lead to stagnation. While traditional methods may feel safer and more predictable, they can also limit creativity and prevent growth. Leaders who defy convention are willing to think outside the box and explore new approaches that others might not consider. This way, they're able to unlock new opportunities for improvement and innovation.

Defying convention involves taking risks. Innovation doesn't come without some level of uncertainty, and leaders who are willing to step outside their comfort zone are more likely to discover breakthroughs. Whether it's implementing a new strategy, reimagining an outdated process, or exploring unconventional ideas, risk-taking is a key ingredient for progress.

Leaders should not only be able to take risks themselves but should also foster a culture of experimentation within their teams. This means giving people the freedom to test new ideas, even if they don't always work out. When leaders encourage experimentation, they create an environment where innovation thrives and members feel empowered to take creative risks.

Chapter 12: Take a Break

In our work to commit constantly to small acts of intentional and incremental leadership behavior, we may overlook a seemingly small act that can reap huge benefits—taking a break.

Hitting the pause button can help us gain a new perspective, refresh our creative energy, relate better to our team members, and spur innovation. While this may be a small act, it's not always easy. We get used to the paths we take day after day, which often lead to comfortable ruts in our personal and professional lives, and intentionally breaking that pattern can be difficult but rewarding.

Despite new technology intended to make our work easier, professionals around the world are working longer hours. The small steps toward changing dead-end and stressful behaviors made over time, such as intentionally taking breaks, can not only make us feel more energetic and optimistic but can also positively affect relationships with those around us.

Leaders often feel pressured to keep pushing themselves and their teams, but continuous work without rest can lead to diminishing returns or burnout. That can lead to not only reduced productivity but also negatively impact health and relationships. This is why we need to recharge our batteries by taking breaks and maintaining our passion and enthusiasm for our work over the long term.

Taking breaks isn't just important for leaders—it's equally crucial for their teams. Leaders set the tone for the culture of their organization, and when they model the importance of rest and recovery, their teams are more likely to follow suit. Encouraging team members to take breaks and allowing them vacation time will lead to significant personal and professional benefits.