



## INTRODUCTION

In 2016, I attended the CTI (Co-Active Training Institute) Leadership Program. Upon arrival, I noticed that one of the leaders, Art Shirk, was wearing oxygen. A few minutes into the first retreat of the program, we found out why the oxygen. Art was previously diagnosed as having IPF (Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis).

IPF is a lung disease that results in scarring of the lungs for an unknown reason. Over time, the scarring gets worse, making it difficult to take a deep breath. Eventually, the lungs cannot take in enough oxygen. There is no known cure for IPF, and its pathology is inevitable and predictable, resulting in death.

Two days before we started the final retreat, Art signed our completion certificates. That same night, while lying next to John, his husband, and Mario, his Golden Doodle, Art lost his life to IPF.

Why would someone choose to lead a program when he knew his time remaining on earth was so limited? Who would think less of Art had he withdrawn from the world to spend every possible minute with John and Mario? What do Art's actions say about leadership?

What I've come to know, thanks to Art, is that leadership is not a thing. Leadership is not a construct, set of competencies, or a skillset. Leadership is not about getting it right, getting people to do something, or getting credit for what happens.

You are a leader because people want to follow you.

## A world of contradictions

When you look at the world of leadership development, you might think I'm taking too simplistic a view of leadership. You might believe that leadership is about competencies, skills, and other things you can measure.

Take, for example, the many leadership assessment tools available today. Some tool providers will tell you how they've worked with hundreds of thousands of leaders, and can accurately measure your leadership competence.

There are thousands of books published on the topic of leadership. Some publications provide tools, frameworks, or methods, while other books tell the story of the most influential leaders throughout history.

You can sign up for a leadership workshop. You can even become certified in leadership, which you might think is handy when you need to prove you are a leader.

There are lists of leadership competencies to which you could subscribe. These lists are full of words like *executive presence*, *strategic thinker*, and *results-oriented*. It seems that every week

someone writes a blog post listing the top ten leadership traits you need to develop.

However, what could you do to prove you have strategic thinking or executive presence? Further, how does being results-oriented confirm you are a leader?

I know plenty of people who score high in many of these measures, and yet they're not being followed by anyone. There must be a missing ingredient.

The list of leadership resources seems infinite. While you may subscribe to and use many of them, not one of them will make or prove you are a leader.

You are a leader because people want to follow you.

## **Becoming the leader people want to follow**

The leaders of my Cub Pack (Scouts Canada) appointed me to my first formal leadership position when I was nine years old. I was a Sixer, which is a youth leader for a small group of Cubs.

I don't remember many of the details about my first leadership role 35 years ago. However, I do have memories of my team of six getting things done and having lots of fun.

Since my start in leadership, I've had the privilege of leading teams with a handful of people, and groups with hundreds of people. I've amassed an extensive library of leadership books. I've taken many courses that have given me the knowledge and tools needed to support my leadership. I've had moments of leadership brilliance and my share of failures. Yes, I've even been fired.

Throughout my years of leading, I've never stopped trying to learn about leadership. There's nothing I've wanted more than to lead people to do and be their best.

What I'm noticing now, though, is how I've come full circle in my beliefs. When I was nine, I *thought* I was a leader because people wanted to follow me. Now, at 53, I *am* a leader because people want to follow me.

I think of a leadership journey as a spiral.



I was at the centre of the spiral when I began leading at age nine. At first, the spiral was small and slow. I presume the same was true for my leadership back then. My leadership was limited to a small group of peers in a simple context.

With time, I started to study leadership. My experiences and opportunities to lead increased. More importantly, I have expanded my understanding of who I am as a leader.

Today, my leadership continues to grow in terms of its effectiveness and impact. Leadership is what the world needs more than

anything right now. Each of us has a unique flavour of leadership to contribute if we choose to do so. I hope you choose to lead.

## Growing leadership

I used to think that improving my ability to lead was a function of time and experience. To develop my leadership, I had to be patient and give it time. I believed people would see me as a great leader when I had more experience.

Thanks to a conversation with my friend Ashley Johnson, I no longer think of growing my leadership as a function of time. If it were a function of time, it would imply that developing my leadership is not in my control.

Growing your leadership is totally within your control. You are the only one who can expand your leadership. What gives you control is how fast you choose to iterate through the spiral.

You will expand your leadership with each step, experience, and interaction. At times, it will be something in your personal life that has an impact. Other times, it's through the work you do, or a workshop you take.

Much like your physical health, growing your leadership is about balance. You will be the leader people want to follow when you are in balance.

If, for example, you focus too much on skills and knowledge, your fears might hold you back when something is making you anxious. Likewise, if you focus too much on understanding yourself, you might lack the skills and knowledge to support your leadership.

Despite what you might be hearing from the world of leadership development, there is no easy way to grow your leadership. Developing your leadership takes hard work. Growth as a leader

takes commitment and a willingness to confront whatever you find along the path.

Through this book, I will help you think about the act of growing your leadership. I want to help you become the leader people want to follow.

While exhausting at times, I can tell you that committing to being the best leader I can is one of the most rewarding choices I've made in my life. When you make your own commitment to leadership you will discover this truth for yourself.

## Writing a book

You are a leader when people want to follow you.

The problem with this definition of leadership, of course, is: How do you become the leader people want to follow?

I used to believe I would be a leader if I could portray the right image. I thought people would follow me if I looked the part, and didn't admit to my mistakes. I also thought I needed to look strong and as if I have it all under control. Leaders don't need help, right?

Given these beliefs, I spent a lot of years searching for the secret to being an effective leader. What I found is, I already had everything needed to be the leader people want to follow.

These beliefs about leadership are at the heart of what Art taught me. Until I accepted all the parts of my story, I would continue to be weighed down by my story. Accepting my story means accepting all of me. The only thing I need to do is to love myself for who I am.

When I started to write this book, I had several people challenge my sanity in writing a leadership book. One stood out as she challenged me with, "What makes you think anyone would read

your book? What makes you stand out against the thousands of leadership books already in existence?”

Leadership books come in all shapes and sizes. Biographies, how-to guides, thought-provoking, and specialized for an industry sector. If you're like me, you've likely read plenty. Yet, you might still find yourself wondering, “what exactly is leadership?”

What I've noticed is, it's as if we've lost sight of what makes someone a leader. We often call someone a leader because of a title, degree, or some life experience. However, none of these things will automatically make you a leader.

Through my work, I've helped leaders (re)discover what it takes to be the leader people want to follow. The secret to great leadership is in you already, and when you are clear on that, you have the opportunity to lead people who'll do things they didn't think was possible for them.

When I first started to discover this truth about leadership, I had more than one person argue with me. People were insistent that you couldn't become a great leader without skills and competencies.

The basis for the writing of this book comes from my work over many years. No one can promise to make you a leader people want to follow. However, I can give you a way of looking at leadership to help you discover your leadership power. It is not a simple path to follow nor is it a sure-fire way to become the leader people want to follow. You get to choose whether you will step into your leadership power. I hope you do.

*Some will. Some won't. Who cares. Who's next?*

— Karen Kimsey-House,  
Co-Active Training Institute (CTI)

## My leadership framework in practice

Sue is a C-level executive at a large company. The first time I met Sue, she brought one of her team members with her. The meeting was intended to be an exploratory conversation about how I might help them.

Fifteen minutes into the meeting, Sue and her team member were having words about a problem they were describing. The conversation had become a little heated when Sue suddenly stopped the conversation by saying, “Let’s take this offline.”

In that short time, I had enough insight into what their struggle might be. I asked Sue and her colleague, “You do know what your problem is, right?” They both looked at me a little puzzled. “You don’t trust each other, which is keeping you from being able to work through this problem.”

The problem they were facing had everything to do with the anxiety they were facing daily. The anxiety is the uncomfortable feeling you get when you’re in conflict with someone. When you feel anxious, you can either solve the problem or the anxiety. Guess which one has a more enduring outcome?

This insight turned out to be at the root of why this leadership team was stuck. Instead of solving problems, they were solving the anxiety they were feeling. At times, it takes courage to stand and face the anxiety you feel as you work through a problem.

For Sue, she believed one of her roles was to play the role of peacekeeper between the team members. In doing this, though, Sue inadvertently sent the message that feeling anxious is not acceptable. Given her leadership style, Sue was teaching her team how to be peacekeepers as well. The peacekeeper culture was limiting this team as it was keeping them from talking about the issues that matter.



In the months that followed, I worked with Sue and her team as they committed to changing their leadership culture. They came to see how their actions as peacekeepers were limiting their success.

To change their behaviours, Sue and her team committed to the work needed to understand their leadership. As a result, they started to approach problems from a solid foundation of what makes them influential leaders. This foundation meant that they would feel more confident in situations with conflict present.

With a little time, Sue started to leave behind her role as peacekeeper. Sue and her team members began to actively engage in unfiltered dialogue and discussion. To people outside her team, it may have seemed as if they were arguing, when in reality they were working on the issues rather than the anxiety they felt.

Sue and her team were able to start turning around their department. Their leadership was beginning to be the reason they were succeeding, rather than what was holding them back.

Today, Sue is tenacious about getting to the truth of a problem. The team respects Sue, and there is a line-up of people wanting to be on her team.

All because Sue took responsibility and dug into knowing what makes her a powerful leader.

## **Choosing your leadership**

A few days before his death, Art took part in a Zoom call with my leadership tribe. It was a bitter-sweet moment with Art, as we knew he was coming toward the end of his life.

I will never forget Art's last words to us. "You know, this leadership thing we choose to do is never really done."

I've only recently come to understand the meaning of these words. Leadership is how I choose to live my life and how I choose to have an impact on the world around me.

Being a leader is who I am and who I will continue to be for the rest of my life.

Who do you choose to be? What inspires you to take a stand? What will you no longer tolerate?

Please, hurry.

The world needs your leadership!