

BETTER LEADERS

What Science, Sports, and Society Teach us
About our Leadership and Professional Growth

Pedro Díaz Rídao, PhD.

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Translated by Scott Minto with the help of the author

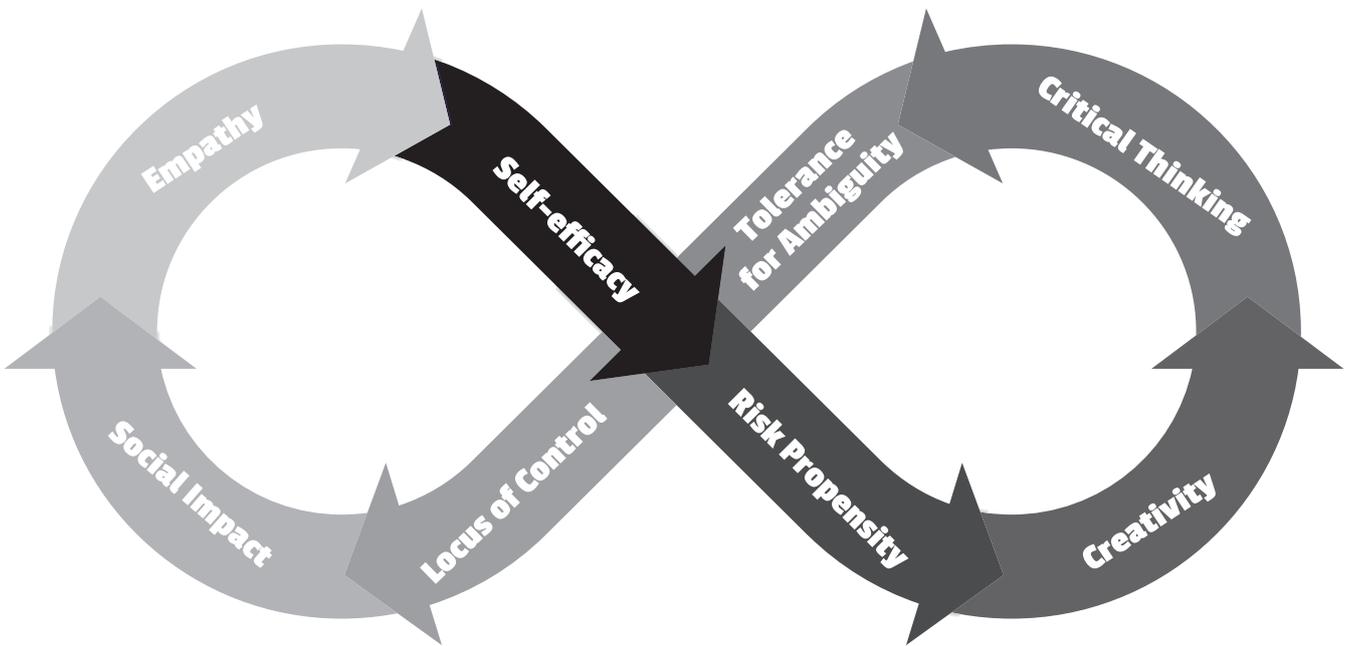
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To María, Hugo and Milo



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Foreword by **Xavier Marcet**

You are about to read a book that puts people at the forefront within organizations, in sports, and in life. We live very compartmentalized lives, but we are always the same people in each facet of our lives. Every situation conditions us, but we remain the same people. Pedro Díaz Ridao proposes a journey of 8 inspiring steps that can be very useful for professional growth. This journey traverses a path of learning through a landscape of personal stories, case studies, and inspiring examples. Díaz uses his proximity to sports to offer us unique insights from that industry that help us understand ourselves better and inspire us to improve. A warning to those seeking a quick-fix; this is not a self-help book. It will not make you a millionaire in fifteen days nor turn you into a charismatic leader in a week. This book is about something else. Better Leaders is about placing value on things that are difficult; if they were easy, they wouldn't make a difference. The lessons that will help us become better leaders stem from the author's own perspective; they are not plug-and-play for all, but rather represent a true story linked to his professional experience.

The foundation of these keys to leadership is based on Self-efficacy, Risk Propensity, Creativity, Critical Thinking, Tolerance for Ambiguity, Locus of Control, Social Impact, and Empathy. These are tools that will help you manage the complexity of both your organization and your life. In the years to come, it's highly likely that the title on our business card will be different from what it is today; changing jobs multiple times is common in most careers. All these new positions, however, will have one thing in common: they will all involve managing complexity. Our education system attempted to prepare us to enter a complicated world, but once we graduate, we build careers in a complex world, not a complicated one. The complicated world was full of problems, the complex world is full of problems and dilemmas.

We talk so much about leadership because it is an ability that synthesizes a variety of professional skills and is one of the few traits that can have a real impact on people and organizations. We know that organizations without effective leadership lack agility; accomplishing anything within such companies is extremely costly. Strong leadership creates natural synergies between employees, making them feel part of a community, a team working toward a common goal. Leading is serving others, not helping oneself. Being a better leader entails developing ourselves through helping others develop and removing the glass ceiling. Leading well involves offering inspiration, and through inspiring others, we learn. Organizations need leaders who combine career ambition with personal humility. In *Better Leaders*, Pedro Díaz Ridao illustrates this, citing examples from the locker rooms of elite clubs in global sports to the boardrooms of top performing corporations. Leaders must lead the campaign against complacency. They must resist the arrogance that is often associated with the successful or powerful. Organizations need leaders who strive to move up, but who won't let success go to their heads. They need leaders who, while looking up and with their feet on the ground, know how to serve their employees by adding meaning and purpose to their work.

I recommend this book and hope that you will enjoy, as I did, learning from its many examples of effective leadership. Díaz offers his own unique perspective on the best way to meet the challenges within our organizations. If we follow the advice in this book, we will take a more human-centered approach and become better leaders.

Xavier Marcet
CEO, Lead to Change

Introduction

How to push our talent towards action

“The time is always right to do what is right.”
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Sometimes we cannot stop doing what we've always done. This phenomenon, which I call “limiting inertia,” makes us continue with what occupies us and at the same time prevents us from taking the time to do something different, from asking ourselves if we can add value from another approach or if we want to build an entirely new project.

Fortunately, today more than ever, we have the possibility to break that inertia. In a world that the Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman calls a liquid society or modernity¹, where what was once solid now may not last a lifetime (marriage, work, etc.), we have the opportunity to take advantage of the freedom we enjoy to go beyond the intention- to action, and generate the future we want.

On the other hand, leadership is more dynamic than ever before. The more that our jobs demand new skills, the more we must resort to our inner core to replace them with new ones and improve our experience toolkit.

This book is the result of a plethora of many experiences, the fruit of the combination of ten years of written scholarship and five years of research. Notes, data, stories and interviews that I felt needed to be shared in order for them to inspire others as they inspired me. Reflections that seek to go one step further in the

conception of talent to prevent the word from becoming trite. And what better way to do it than from the base, from its essence. Hence the eight features that I describe in the book. Eight qualities that explain what we need to do to take action. Eight factors related not only to success in the creation of projects, but to something much more important: the generation of more complete leaders, of people prepared for what the new professional industry demands. What is currently required and what will be demanded of us in the coming years, based on what is reflected in the report of the Davos World Forum on the skills that we will need in 2025². But more than training ourselves for what the industry or what our own employees will need, this book aims to help us to be the ones to make that choice.

Manpower's Millennial Careers: 2020 Vision³ report also shows that success is increasingly about skills rather than having the right contacts. Thanks to the Internet and social networks, contacts are much easier to get, and true connections are much more than mere contacts. The focus lies more than ever on skills and training. Another report by the same company reveals that 45% of employers are unable to find the skills they require in the market⁴ and the word most used by hiring departments is learnability: companies look for workers who have the desire and the ability to develop long-term skills. It no longer matters so much what we have, but what we could have in the future. We are no longer evaluated so much for what we have done, but for what we are able to learn and put into practice. We have passed from being consumers of work to being builders of talent, from being workers to being creative, but in many cases they have not given us the tools.

In a survey of 1,293 corporate CEOs by the consulting firm PriceWaterhouseCoopers⁵, 63% of them believed that globalization has greatly helped to achieve greater connectivity. However, 82% believed that the world is moving toward a fragmented ecosystem with more and more different rules and values between countries. This was also reflected in the title of the 2018 Davos Forum: "Creating a shared future in a fractured world."⁶ Another alarming data point shows that only 18% think that connectivity and globalization have contributed to reducing the gap between rich and poor countries.

This book does not intend to give any magic recipe, but rather to help us take a photograph of ourselves and, throughout its eight chapters, discover aspects of ourselves through inspiring stories from sports, business and society. It's about the elements that help us enhance the qualities that will make us go from intention to action. Intention helps us dream, but it is action that helps us achieve.

Probably the eight traits that I share here are not the most important, perhaps there is some scientific rigor lacking despite my five years of research, which are, in turn, supported by references to studies from the last fifty years. What I do hope, and wish, is that they can contribute to form what our society needs: better leaders.

1.

SELF EFFICACY.

YOUR DEGREE DOESN'T DEFINE YOU

THE SOURCES OF
SELF-EFFICACY ARE:

- MASTERY EXPERIENCES
- OBSERVATION
- VERBAL PERSUASION
- EMOTIONAL AND
PHYSIOLOGICAL STATES



MEJORES líderes

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#BETTERLEADERS

Chapter 1

Self-Efficacy

Your Degree Does Not Define You

"I am not what happened to me, I am what I choose to become."

Carl Jung

1. FROM SURVIVORS TO BETTER LEADERS

We have to make many decisions in life without perfect information. For example, we have to pick a career at 18, when in most cases, we still have no idea who we really are. Many people agree that if they had the chance to live their lives all over again, which is impossible to do, they perhaps would have selected another profession. In the United States, for example, only 27% of graduates work in their field of study¹, and the same goes for other countries, such as Mexico². It seems logical to think that many people would have liked to have studied something else, since it's very hard to have things figured out at age 17. Furthermore, our family members, although they have the best intentions, often make this choice more difficult. A large number of graduate students I've worked with over the years have related to me that graduate school is the first time they've had the opportunity to study something that actually interests them. And even worse, the master's degree represents the first time they've distinctly chosen their own specific field of study...another reason why so many would have studied a distinct major has to do with, although they learn a series of competencies and skills, years later their jobs require a completely different set of skills. The resulting perspective is that it's easy to know what tools would have been great to have, and at the same time easy to see where parents went wrong raising us, but difficult to see where we're going wrong now in raising our children. Hindsight is always 20/20. And it's also true that, until we really need something (for example, speaking a foreign language), it's really hard to find the motivation for knowledge or skills because we've never seen the need for them.

Someone who's studied something different is Ethan Zohn. I can introduce you to Ethan by asking you the following: What would you do if you won a million dollars? Before I tell you what he did, and yes, he won a million dollars, it's best if I tell you who Ethan is. He's an American, born in Massachusetts, and he didn't decide his career at 17 years old, but rather at 14. Precisely, it was right after cancer had taken his father away. "At that moment I decided I was going to be a doctor and dedicated myself to saving lives," Ethan told me at a café near Columbus Circle in New York City. We met there for an interview for my doctoral thesis³, a meeting Ethan had happily accepted without knowing me at all. For my thesis, I focused my research on interviewing successful social entrepreneurs (who had projects with a concrete impact) with the idea of discovering common traits among them (education, professional experience, family background, etc.) which could serve to form the top leaders of the future; people who create transcendent projects to improve society, in this case through sport.

Ethan continued with the established plan (he was pre-med with a plan to become a doctor) until something crossed his path; and that something was...soccer. During a visit to Hawaii on a marine biology research trip just before medical school, Ethan tried out for the Hawaii Tsunami, a professional soccer club, and

was signed by the team. Since he was a young boy, he'd been a goalie in various local leagues, but he never thought it was something he'd do professionally. At that moment he decided to veer away from his dream of being a doctor for another very distinct path: being a professional soccer player. After Hawaii, he had other opportunities to play throughout the U.S. and beyond that, an experience that would later bring him to Zimbabwe as a player for Highlanders F.C. There, apart from a critical, unforgettable experience, he had a bitter realization seeing how many people he knew, including teammates, were dying of AIDS. "If I could go back to when I was 18, I would take a gap year to travel and work. Actually, it would help me to get to know myself better. That way I would have had things a lot better figured out before going to college," he told me as we continued our conversation at Argo Tea & Coffee. In 2002, just after retiring from soccer, Ethan decided to embark on an adventure that would shape the rest of his life, similar to college years or other vital experiences (military service, first time abroad, first job, etc.) that shape many people's lives- mine included- that have helped many forge the path that has let them to today. The challenge Ethan took on was to sign up for a reality show called "Survivor: Africa." That, as you can imagine, was how he ended up winning a million dollars. The interesting part of his story is not the "what" (the fact that he won), but rather the "how," since he was able to get the majority of votes⁵ from his fellow competitors, who are at the same time rivals with whom you're forced to have a good relationship. He forged a trusting relationship despite being in a naturally hostile environment. "When they leave you without anything, as we were on that island, you're only left with the essence of yourself. When you're tired and hungry, to hang on and not explode, the only thing you have left are your values, your personality, and your true self."

One of the measuring sticks of our evolution and personal development is our capacity to relate to people very different from ourselves. During the competition, Ethan had to put up with being mocked by one of the other contestants, which included jokes about his Jewish heritage. Ethan didn't only endure; he won the competition. When it was time to decide what to do with the million dollars, hundreds of thoughts came to mind, including which of the various models and colors of Porsche he would buy. But there was one thought that won out on that competition, that took place in Ethan's mind: his experience in Zimbabwe, where he understood how an illness could affect so many people he knew. This helped him decide that he would invest the money in something much bigger than himself, something transcendent. This "something" ended up being Grassroot Soccer, a foundation that combats AIDS through education and soccer and whose work began in Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Zambia. It is now in more than fifty countries around the world. The project was funded along with soccer player and pediatrician Tommy Clark and, in a few years, a million dollars turned into a million children who have graduated from its different programs (and now over two million beneficiaries). But the million dollars has also turned into more than a hundred employees, around two thousand volunteers, and an annual budget of nine million

dollars, which has the effect of multiplying talent. Sports celebrities such as David Beckham, Alex Ferguson, Freddie Ljungberg, Christen Press, Robert Pirès and Rachel Riley have also assisted this project through its various initiatives. One of the most well-known of these was through Ethan himself, traveling 885 km (500 miles) on foot from Boston to Washington, D.C. to raise awareness of Grassroot Soccer and fundraise for new projects. And yes, as you might guess, he didn't make that journey by himself, he was dribbling a soccer ball the whole time.

Although his profession changed, there's perhaps not much difference in the essence of that boy who wanted to be a doctor and the one who ended up being a soccer player. "Honestly, what I do in my job is save lives, although I'm not a doctor." To Ethan, his major doesn't define him, and it's much more than his past. Nor does he work "for himself," because talent doesn't understand ownership. He doesn't want to be a victim of his studies nor his past and surely within ten years he'll be doing something different, just like you and me. What's truly important is not what we do, but that what we do makes sense for us.

"Being a better leader is knowing how to connect the experience of the present with the opportunities of the future."

2. SELF-EFFICACY AND ITS MOTIVES

Self-efficacy, a concept introduced by psychologist Albert Bandura⁴ at the end of the 1970s, is the belief in our capacity to successfully be successful with a job or achieving a goal. In other words, it has to do with the confidence that we have in our capacity to overcome the challenges that life presents us. According to Bandura, if you don't believe that you have the capacity to see a job through, you'll be much less likely to start it. Or, if you do start it, you'll be more likely to give up on it before finishing.

Ethan Zohn represents the first feature of top leaders: self-efficacy. The same as he wouldn't have undertaken an 885 km journey if he didn't think he'd arrive at the destination, top leaders have the confidence that they can achieve the results that they set out to achieve in the projects they undertake or manage.

Different people take distinct paths to their current jobs and are probably more successful as a result of that, not in spite of it. That is to say, they lean upon all of their past experiences to build the confidence when looking at challenges they face. For them, it doesn't matter if changes are major or not, but rather they're needed, if it creates "something" inside of them that triggers a spark of action.

Self-efficacy constitutes one of the axial components of our personality and helps us understand how our mind functions when confronted by the challenges we

face: as we complete tasks at our job, every little successful situation increases our self-efficacy. In other words, the more we do a task, the more self-confidence we have, and the more self-confidence we have, the better we do the task. For example, if we decided to start running, every small successful milestone (such as completing 1 km without stopping the first day, completing a 5k within the first few months, etc.) will give us the confidence to improve each day and not throw in the towel.

For Bandura, there are four sources of self-efficacy:

- 1) **Mastery.** Daily practice is the main source of self-efficacy development. The “flight hours” that we dedicate to a task give us those little success stories that fuel our self-efficacy.
- 1) **Observation.** Seeing how others with capacities similar to ours complete their tasks gives us the confidence that we can do it as well. On the other hand, seeing others fail at a certain task undermines our belief that we can do it ourselves.
- 1) **Verbal Persuasion.** Our environment also influences our self-efficacy: having people around us persuading us that we can achieve a certain task makes us do more to achieve it. Two great examples of this are personal trainers or our partners, who motivate us to do something difficult.
- 1) **Emotional and Physiological States.** Our behavior is also influenced by the physical or emotional state in which we find ourselves at a specific moment, and what will increase or reduce self-efficacy is not the intensity of that emotion, but rather how we perceive and interpret it. This explains, for example, why some runners decide the day before a race not to participate if they notice a slight discomfort that might prevent them from achieving a time they’d hope to achieve.

Bandura demonstrated that motivation is not exclusively intrinsic, but rather is influenced as much by our environment as it is in our minds. Or, similarly, each lesson we learn is born from three factors: our personal characteristics (our genes), behavior patterns, and our social environment.

One of the studies of my doctoral thesis, comprised of a sample of four hundred postgraduate students in fifteen Spanish business schools, showed that students who played sports showed higher rates of self-efficacy than those who did not. Specifically, they felt more capable of creating projects, taking initiative, and developing relationships with others. And this group of students also demonstrated a higher intention to become entrepreneurs than those who didn’t play sports⁵. This positive correlation between playing sports and self-efficacy can be added to the long list of physical and psycho-social benefits of participating in sports.

But, in addition to playing sports, the study also showed that there was another factor that significantly raised the students’ self-confidence: having an additional degree. The study reflected that it didn’t so much matter what type of degree it

was, but rather, the studying itself mattered most. In other words, the experience of having carried out further studies can help give us this increased degree of self-efficacy, regardless of whether they're one thing or another. At this moment, I began to think of people in my network who were working in fields that were vastly different from those in which they'd trained.

One of the most striking cases is that of a good friend of mine who was signed as an assistant coach for an NFL team with no professional experience in football. The reason? He'd spent the previous five years in the United States Marine Corps and the team needed someone methodical who could bring discipline and a work plan in which everything was controlled in detail. He demonstrated that the key is not so much in what you've previously accomplished, but rather if you're able to combine these experiences with the needs of a specific organization or the current marketplace. The skills and competencies are there, but we need self-efficacy, and confidence, to put them to use and add value wherever we go.

Another example of proactive behavior and self-efficacy is found in a story related to modern music. When he was in Miami to record his second album, *El Mundo y los Amantes Inocentes*, Spanish singer and composer Pablo López was going to achieve his dream of meeting the Colombian famed musician Juanes. One Thursday afternoon they were set to meet, thanks to Jesús López, Universal Music President for Spain and Latin America, who told them they needed to know one another. Pablo accepted without batting an eye, and after two beers with Juanes, he "got his courage up," as he said later, and was encouraged to propose that they sing a song together on the new album.

The funny thing is, the hit single that Pablo spoke about didn't actually exist. He knew that it was probably the only chance he'd get to be able to sing with Juanes and, as soon as Juanes agreed, Pablo locked himself in the studio until he had composed a song and was ready to sing with him. The song was called "Tu Enemigo" ("Your Enemy") and Pablo was inspired to write it by his experiences with immigration controls in the United States. "As soon as Juanes said yes, I locked myself in the studio and wrote what came out of my soul thinking that it was going to be sung with him and it would last forever." Pablo had the audacity to put himself out there without having composed the song, but perhaps the fact that he'd done so was precisely what made him write a song of such enormous quality, so as not to disappoint his idol.

In my conversations with students and graduates about the future, I often tell them this phrase: "If you don't think that what you are doing now will not serve you in the future, remember that Lamborghini began by selling tractors." And it became the best producer of tractors until one day they decided to be the best producer of sports cars. Being a better leader is knowing how to connect the experiences of the present with the opportunities of the future and, when we have few opportunities, having the patience to wait for the moment to make those connections.

Pablo López wouldn't have created "Tu Enemigo," which ended up earning him three platinum records and worldwide fame, had it not been for the opportunity that Jesus López gave him by introducing him to Juanes. But it is also true that, once López had the context, he was the one who was in charge of generating the opportunity, being proactive knowing that the perfect moment doesn't exist and sometimes you have to force it. López knew how to take advantage of that "yes" to commit himself to Juanes and, above all, to his own talent.

"Don't have fear of perfection, you'll never reach it." – Salvador Dalí

3. THE DIFFERENCE IS IN THE MIX

Edouard Legendre has achieved in 25 years of a professional career what many would love to achieve in two and a half lifetimes: he was a key element in the sponsorship boom in Formula 1 and he's worked at the most important advertising agencies in the world. Legendre has had the opportunity to manage large investments in the sponsorship of companies like Ford, Shell, Telefónica, Barclays, Santander, etc. and worked for brands like Formula 1, UEFA Champions League, Real Madrid C.F., and the Spanish Basketball Federation. But when you meet him, what catches your attention most is not his résumé, which is impressive, but rather his ability to think differently (as a good marketing expert) and his unique ability to create amazing projects where few saw value. One day he is managing the closing of a partnership of tens of millions of Euros and the next day he's creating a strategy to enhance the value of Spanish bakers and create a Spanish brand in this category. He does everything with the same affection and with the same nonconformity. Although we have known one another for quite some time, it was not until just a few years ago that he told me that his daughter really liked dance and that she was taking classes from renowned dancer and choreographer Víctor Ullate at a school very close to where I lived. When I asked Edouard what he thought of the idea that his daughter might delay her university studies to dedicate her body and soul to dance, he answered "That would be great."

His was not a thoughtless response; that's not his style. Behind that concise phrase were several decades of experience, added to his daughter's passion for dance. "I'll explain to you the reason why I would accept this as a father, apart from this being her decision and the most important thing is to respect that: at my job, I see more than 100 résumés a week, all really good, but too similar. The majority of people submitting them have studied the same thing, gone to the same business schools, have taken the same courses. As an employer, if one day I see a resume and read that the person has dedicated five or ten years to dance, even if it's delayed their university studies, I know that if we get an urgent request from a client and we need help, this person will do it, it's not necessary to instill discipline in someone who's been practicing it for ten years. What's important is not what

we have done, but whether we can say what we learned from these experiences, what living abroad, studying a specific major, or practicing a sport have taught us. What I'm looking for are people who are able to tell me what they've created, that show me that they're unique."

The more we talk about the importance of skills or competencies, the more important it is to connect them with our past, looking back to see what we're lacking, but also what we have in abundance, which is what we've been building almost without realizing it. Nobody starts dancing because they want to have more discipline; discipline is a consequence of their decision. Therefore, it is interesting to look not only at the causes of our actions, but especially at the impact that they've had on our lives. Deciding on a career because it has more job opportunities than another doesn't guarantee that we'll be more employable. On the other hand, deciding to study a major, a master's degree, a doctorate, or a certain sport simply because it appeals to us can give us the tools to connect what we do with what a specific industry sector may need in a few years.

And there can also be a new paradox: if what we need are new skills to respond to the needs of a volatile and changing environment and these are transferred from person to person, perhaps it's more important to choose a boss than a company. Perhaps it's more important to choose a teacher than a master's program.

4. STUDENTS AND CAPTAINS

Buried in the text of a 1997 clinical psychology book called "Aversive Interpersonal Behaviors," there is a chapter titled "Blowhards, Snobs, and Narcissists: Interpersonal Reactions to Excessive Egotism." The research article concludes that self-centered people who project arrogance in their speech and body language tend to be viewed less favorably by others and can weaken a group's cohesion. Among the study's authors was a boy named Tim Duncan. Duncan was not just another Psychology student at Wake Forest University, he was the star of the university's basketball team. From the moment he arrived on the NBA's San Antonio Spurs, Duncan seemed determined to abide by the conclusions of his bachelor's thesis: he never asked for special privileges, never skipped a workout, and he was never bothered if he was chewed out by coaches after a bad performance. It's as if Duncan had used his Wake Forest thesis as a project about how to be a true teammate in a league where the "narcissists" and the "fanatics" were the kings of the castle.

This story, excerpted from the book *The Captain Class* by journalist Sam Walker, represents a good example of a new concept of leadership that the author shares in his work that is based on the study of hundreds of sports teams: what makes up the difference between some teams and others it's not the quality of the players nor the coach: it's the captain. In the book, Walker argues that the only trait that

was common among the teams analyzed was that of the captain: all teams had a leader on the field of play who completely and unselfishly exemplified the team's philosophy. One of them was Duncan. Unlike other captain-leaders, he was not a fan of neither tongue-lashings nor speeches; he preferred to observe, to be in the background, in order to read what the players needed.

As his coach Gregg Popovich said, "Duncan was the opposite of MTV." The former Spurs franchise player had been a diligent student and knew how to connect his Wake Forest education with managing people in his role as the leader of the Spurs. Duncan showed that you can be shy and a great leader at the same time. Further, he showed that you can be a great leader thanks to shyness, in his case focused on being invisible, towards actions more than words. History will remember the five NBA rings that he achieved with San Antonio Spurs and that the team made the playoffs in each of the 19 seasons he played for the team. But perhaps his most astonishing record is that he is the player who won the most games with a single team in NBA history. Since he wouldn't have it any other way, Duncan was even discreet in his retirement ceremony. The best leaders know how to arrive, but above all, how to leave.

He was widely regarded as a great- if boring- player, and he ended up being a magnificent and discreet player loved by all. And he did it by being true to his essence and accepting himself as he was. As Brené Brown reflects in her book *Rising Strong*, "When we deny our stories, they define us. When we take over our stories, we get to write the ending." Duncan did not deny his past or his way of being. He lived on the court as he lived off it. He seized his past and wrote the ending he had dreamed of, and he was even more of a central character in the story than he could have ever imagined.

5. DA VINCI: LETTERS AND SCIENCES

Adam Grant, author of the books *Give and Take*, *Originals*, and *Option B*, interviewed⁶ Walter Isaacson- perhaps the most prolific writer of biographies in modern history, for the release of his book on Leonardo da Vinci. Isaacson confessed that upon reading Da Vinci's notebooks, the thing that most surprised him was to verify that he was human, seeing that he made mathematical errors and even left some works unfinished.

Isaacson, in addition to being a novelist, currently runs the Aspen Institute, a center dedicated to reimagining the future of innovation and education. In his interview with Grant, the author of a *Steve Jobs* biography argued that leaving the arts aside to give science even more weight in education could be a big mistake. "I can't stop hearing that people have to learn to code. No, the machines are going to do this for us. What we need to know is how programming works, what an algorithm and

a logical sequence are, but we will never program better than the machines. That would have been helpful in the 1970s, but not now. Now, the revolution is about connecting disciplines with one another, connecting medicine, technology, music, and art with one another.” He continued with an example: “Steve Jobs hardly knew how to program, which Bill Gates did very well. When they both went to make a music player, Bill produced the Zune and Steve the iPod... Because Steve adored the humanities, he knew how to give importance to aesthetics, he knew that beauty was important.”

For Da Vinci, beauty and detail were of utmost importance. His more than 7,200 pages of notes with annotations give a good example of this. However, what Isaacson highlights most about him is the deep curiosity he felt for multiple disciplines that are very distinct from one another. “He was able to see patterns in nature.” Apple’s Steve Jobs was known for uniting art and technology in his creations, and famously said “It is in Apple’s DNA that technology alone is not enough- it’s technology married with liberal arts, married with the humanities, that yields us the results that make our heart sing.” Jobs once told Isaacson that Leonardo was the master of masters in this field. “Leonardo had the ability to not only connect art and science but to make no distinction between the beauty of art and science.” A current example of this mix is found at the Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford University, known as the “d.school.” Here, work teams are not formed by areas of knowledge, but rather they work in a multidisciplinary way: business administration, law, engineering, teaching, and medicine come together to create innovative products.

But there are also those who argue that at the time Da Vinci lived, it was much easier to create because there were far fewer things created, the margin was greater. In the case of the Italian artist, at twelve years old he was already welding and carrying out engineering work for the architect Filippo Brunelleschi. “Leonardo was a social misfit,” continues Isaacson. “He was an illegitimate son, born of witchcraft, gay, left-handed, and vegetarian. And yet he was loved by everyone in Florence. They accepted him as he was and accepted that he was interested in everything.” In our current time, it is more difficult to get work experience from a young age. And this prevents us from acquiring skills that we will surely need as adults. For years I criticized my mother – half jokingly, half seriously- for putting me to work selling products in the summer and on some weekends when I was eleven or twelve. Over time I realized that I had been honing my social skills and customer service abilities since I was little, without even realizing it. We are a collection of the fruits of the education, both formal and informal, that we’ve undertaken since we were young, and most of these fruits have been totally invisible to us all along. For Isaacson, we are isolating ourselves and specializing too much and, “if Da Vinci went to university today, I only know that it would be multidisciplinary. When people ask me about what they should study, I always tell them to do a hybrid degree, which mixes music with physics, literature with mathematics. To demonstrate that they can cross different disciplines.”

Another person who has known how to mix disciplines is José Ángel Sánchez. The general manager of Real Madrid graduated in Philosophy and Literature and worked as a commercial director at the video game company Sega. Upon his arrival at the club in 2000, he revolutionized the club's marketing, setting an example for the rest of the world, and became a key player in successes that would come later. Unlike the reserved Duncan, Sánchez (or "JAS," as many colleagues affectionately call him), led from reflection and speaking, since he uses a careful and profound manner of speech. In a world of Sciences, he from Letters thinks differently, and vice versa. What he shared (and shares) with Duncan is his essence as a leader, based on three aspects: invisibility, courtesy and efficiency. His colleague and deputy general manager, Begoña Sanz, selected as the most influential woman in the sports industry in Spain in 2015⁷, has also been able to connect disciplines: she studied pharmacy before entering the world of marketing and business management.

Da Vinci, Tim Duncan, Edouard Legendre, Pablo López and Ethan Zohn share a high degree of curiosity for learning, for discovering new things, regardless of their status. Some, like Leonardo, even made a daily list of what they wanted to learn that day. According to educator and productivity expert Stephen Covey: "We are not the product of our circumstances. We are the product of our decisions." The protagonists of this chapter decided to be curious, try new things, and take the approach of a beginner in spite of their roles as captains. They decided to create their own opportunities despite not having everything under control and they took over their past to build the present they wanted. Each of them mixed different disciplines to end up doing what they really wanted.

"Your present circumstances don't determine where you can go, they merely determine where you start." _Nido Qubein