



Duke Integrative Medicine

# Informed Mindfulness



## The Power of Awareness and Choice in Effective Leadership

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Michael Aquilino, Bonnie Horrigan and Adam Perlman

A publication from the  
Leadership Program in Integrative Healthcare at Duke University





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## The Power of Awareness and Choice in Effective Leadership

By Michael Aquilino, Bonnie Horrigan and Adam Perlman, MD, MPH

## An Introduction

*Always give cause for boundless  
good fortune to arise.*

Informed mindfulness is a concept that was first introduced in the white paper, *The Pebble in the Pond*, which was written in 2014 by select faculty for the Leadership Program in Integrative Healthcare at Duke University.

Informed mindfulness is a concept that connects mindful self-awareness and self-regulation with educated, conscious decision-making. The mindful person is aware, non-judgmentally, of what is occurring in the present moment and understands that his or her response is a choice. As situations arise and decision points are faced, a mindful person is able to place the circumstances in a larger context that includes more than self, and, having clear values and being sufficiently knowledgeable, can set a path forward by making an *informed choice* within that moment.

An *informed choice* is not a reflex or a reaction; nor is it a choice shaped by unconscious

influences. An *informed choice* is a deliberate, thoughtful decision made with full awareness of the circumstances and influencing factors involved. When coupled with favorable intent as well as knowledge and skills, informed choices lead to the best possible outcomes for all concerned.

The very essence of informed mindfulness is the ability to choose wisely. And with choice, comes great freedom and capability. And that is the best possible place from which to lead.

*Note: A thorough investigation of the concepts in this paper occurs during the Leadership Program in Integrative Healthcare at Duke University.*

## SECTION ONE

## Awareness

*Mindfulness means being awake.  
It means knowing what you are doing.<sup>1</sup>*

In contemporary American society, mindfulness meditation has come to mean a particular way to deepen self-awareness and increase one's ability to stay focused and present in the moment. It refers to awareness that is "cultivated by *paying attention* in a sustained and particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally."<sup>2</sup>

While beneficial on many levels, true mindfulness practice is not just about being aware of one's self and one's circumstances. Developing such awareness is simply the first step. Awareness opens the door and enables us to see the myriad of possibilities that exist, our inherent biases and tendencies, and the many influences that are present, both empowering and limiting, both conscious and unconscious. Once we are aware of these factors, we can begin the processes of sorting and shifting, of throwing out and embracing, and of discovering and recovering, all which nurture self-development. That is the real purpose behind mindfulness practice — to emerge as a more whole, more aware, and more compassionate and wise person.

This is the commitment expected of anyone on an Integrative Leadership path — a commitment to become the best possible version of themselves.

At its core, mindfulness is *awareness with a purpose*; it is a *practice that facilitates change*. As Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD, explains, mindfulness is a way of engaging in (1) systematically regulating our attention and energy (2) thereby influencing and possibly regulating the quality of our experience (3) in the service of realizing the full range of our humanity and (4) of our relationships to others and the world.<sup>3</sup>

Leaders in any position carry a great responsibility to guide their team and help them achieve the goals to which they have committed. It isn't always easy. In fact, it's probably never easy — problems arise, people get upset, circumstances beyond one's control can change the environment. But being ever mindful is the first step to calming the winds of any storm.

Commenting on the purpose of mindfulness practice, in his article "Mindful Practice," published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Ronald M. Epstein, MD, writes that, "The goals of mindful practice are to become more aware of one's own mental processes, listen more attentively, become flexible, and recognize bias and judgments, and thereby act with principles and compassion."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life*, Hachett Books, 1994.

<sup>2</sup>Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Mindfulness for Beginners: Reclaiming the Present Moment — and Your Life*. Sounds True. Boulder, Colorado, 2012.

<sup>3</sup>Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Mindfulness for Beginners: Reclaiming the Present Moment — and Your Life*. Sounds True. Boulder, Colorado, 2012.

<sup>4</sup>Ronald M. Epstein, MD, "Mindful Practice," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, September 1, 1999, Volume 282, No, 9.

## Mind Upholds the World

Our minds are powerful agents in the creation of our lives — perhaps the most powerful agent — which is why becoming familiar with one's own mind is so important. Jeffrey Brantley, MD, who teaches mindfulness for the Leadership Program in Integrative Healthcare at Duke, says that, "There is a wisdom saying that points to the power of our thoughts and emotions to shape our perceptions and reactions in each moment. One version of the saying is: 'Mind upholds the world.'"

He goes on to explain, "This statement could mean many things, but it can be useful to reflect on it from the position of the present moment, resting in awareness and becoming mindful of your thoughts and emotions, and your personality's view about who and what you are, and who others are. If you wished, you could make the statement that a mindfulness practice — pausing to notice frequently throughout the day — helps you to observe exactly how *your* "mind" is upholding *your* world. You could also notice others closely, such as when they act from anger or fear, and recognize and understand how what happens in *their* mind upholds *their* world, moment by moment."

Below is a mindfulness meditation he recommends for developing awareness of one's mind.

*Pause at different times in your busy day to be mindful of your experience — noticing the context around you, and including your thoughts, bodily sensations, and emotions. Gathering attention and steadying it with a light focus on a bodily sensation like the breathing, or the sensations in your feet if*

*you are walking or moving, allow yourself to be open and receptive to the thoughts and emotions you are experiencing. It is good enough simply to notice the thoughts; you don't have to control them, make them go away, or add to them. As you are noticing, pay attention to any emotions that may be present with your thoughts — feelings of anger, impatience, joy, or anticipation, for example. As you practice noticing your thoughts and emotions more often throughout the day, also notice how the thoughts uphold the emotion, or the emotions fuel the thoughts. Can you notice the ways a thought train you are having is affecting your view of others and the world around you? For example, if you are having worried thoughts, do others seem more threatening? If you are having happy thoughts, do people seem friendlier? In any moment, how are your habit patterns of thinking and feeling upholding your perception of the immediate and specific world around you?*<sup>5</sup>

## Neuroplasticity

At some point in your practice, you will come to fully realize that you are not your thoughts and you are not your emotions. While you "have" such things, they are not you and you can choose to change them at any time.

The next time you pause to meditate and a thought fills your mind, notice that it came into your awareness at some point and that it will leave your awareness at some point but that you, the being who is aware, remain throughout. The thought may have triggered a biological or emotional reaction or both, which makes it seem "real," but in reality it is just a thought, just an opinion. If you change the thought, the emotions and sensations connected to it will also change.

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<sup>5</sup>Jeffrey Brantley, MD, Mindfulness Practice Notes #2, Winter Leadership E-Newsletter 2015.  
<https://www.dukeintegrativemedicine.org/mindfulness-practice-notes-2/>

The fact that we can change our thoughts and thus our habits and behaviors is possible through a phenomenon known as neuroplasticity. Neuroplasticity refers to the brain's ability to reorganize itself by forming new neural connections throughout life. It enables the neurons (nerve cells) in the brain to compensate for injury and disease and to adjust their activities in response to new situations or to changes in their environment. <sup>6</sup>

As Linda Smith, PA, MS, Director of Educational Programs for Duke Integrative Medicine, explains, "When we first learn to do something, such as playing a musical instrument, we have to think about the task, focus and concentrate. Over time, as we repeat the actions, we form deep neural grooves in our brain and we are able to complete those actions without thinking about them.

"When the repetition of neurons firing together has occurred often enough, a pattern is created in our brains that is largely automatic and can occur *without conscious direction*. Not only do we have skill-based patterns, we also have emotional patterns and mental patterns in our brains that have been created over time and which inform our behaviors. Maybe we learned early on that if we got angry, people would back off. Or if we were deeply disappointed about something, food made us feel better.

"But change is always an option; always possible. We can consciously choose to change our minds, redirect our attention and revise how we respond to life circumstances. The mind has the power to direct the brain's activity and ultimately to change the very physiology of the brain and the habits that have been formed over our lifetime."

With the help of modern scanning equipment, extensive research has helped document the science behind neuroplasticity. Concurrently, research into the brains of meditators shows practicing mindfulness changes the physical structure of the brain. Richard Davidson, PhD, Director of the Waisman Laboratory for Brain Imaging and Behavior, and Founder of the Center for Healthy Minds at the Waisman Center, University of Wisconsin-Madison, says: "There are many different mechanisms of neuroplasticity ranging from the growth of new connections to the creation of new neurons. When the framework of neuroplasticity is applied to meditation, we suggest that the mental training of meditation is fundamentally no different than other forms of skill acquisition that can induce plastic changes in the brain." <sup>7</sup>

The upshot — when practicing mindfulness, you are changing your brain and growing your muscles of awareness and your ability to focus your attention. You are increasing your ability to choose wisely.

Once you have mastered the ability to focus your attention and are mindful of your present circumstances, here are three meditations that will help you become aware of feelings and beliefs that may be influencing you on an unconscious level.

- *In a mindful, focused state place your attention on yourself. Notice your thoughts and emotions, any aches or pains, perhaps even the temperature in the room. Expand your awareness to include whatever furniture you are sitting on and whoever is in the same room with you. Next, expand your awareness to the entire building you are in, including all the floors, all*

<sup>6</sup>MedicineNet.com. Accessed 20 July 2017.

<sup>7</sup>Richard Davidson, PhD. Buddha's Brain: Neuroplasticity and Meditation. *IEEE Signal Process Mag.* 2008 Jan 1; 25(1): 176–174.



*the rooms, all the windows. Then expand even further to the grounds outside. How far can your awareness reach?*

- *In a mindful state, focus on a situation that you need to handle. Ask yourself: What am I excluding? Whatever arises, bring it in, face it. Notice whatever feelings arise.*
- *In a mindful state of focused concentration, ask yourself: How does all that happens in the world come into being?*

### Clear Comprehension

As a person's mindfulness practice deepens, he or she develops "clear comprehension." Joseph Goldstein explains that, "Cultivating clear comprehension, knowing what we're doing and why, is a profound and transforming practice. It highlights the understanding that mindfulness is more than simply being present. With clear comprehension, we know the purpose and appropriateness of what we're doing; we understand the motivations behind our actions." <sup>8</sup>

For someone in a leadership role, this allows him or her to lead with clarity of purpose and intent.

Scholar R.M.L. Gethin, who analyzed the ways that mindfulness has been used throughout Buddhist history, summed up the elements of mindfulness practice as:

- *Not forgetting*, which means not losing what is before the mind in the present moment.
- *Presence of Mind*, which means directly facing what is arising.
- *Remembering*, which refers to calling to mind what is skillful and what is not, what is beneficial and what is harmful.
- *Close association with wisdom*, which means innate wakefulness coupled with clear comprehension or seeing something precisely and thoroughly from all sides. <sup>9</sup>

Awareness, the subject of this section, is about *Not forgetting* and *Presence of Mind*. Our next section, Choice, is about *Remembering* and *Close association with wisdom*.

<sup>8</sup>Joseph Goldstein. *Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening*. Boulder, Colorado: Sounds True. 2013. Page 11.

<sup>9</sup>Robert Mark Lovell Gethin, *The Buddhist Path to Awakening*. One World, Oxford, England. 2001.



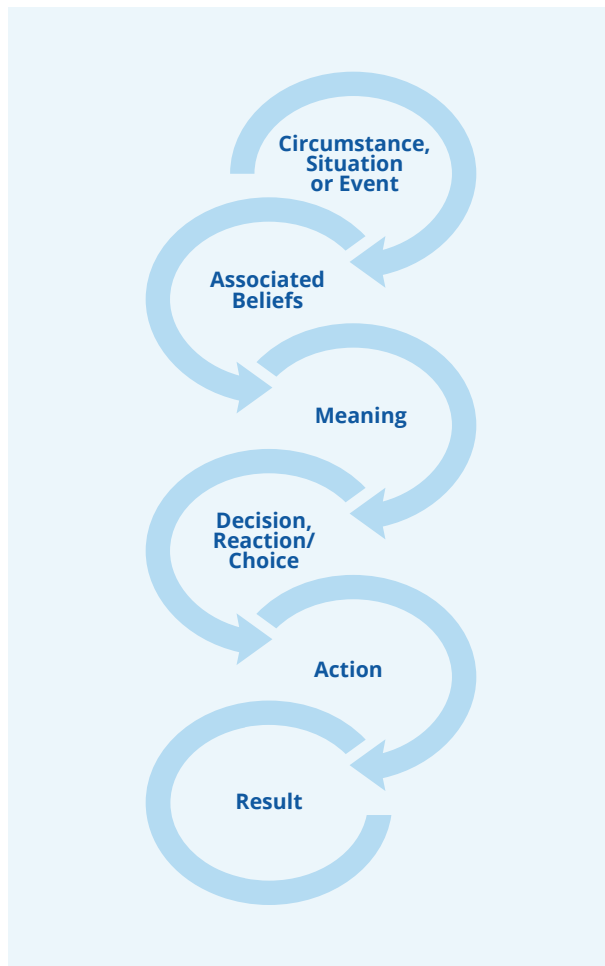
## SECTION TWO

## Choice

### *Awareness alone is not sufficient for change.*

Once we have gained a certain competency in maintaining mindful awareness, we can begin to examine our behaviors more deeply and, using the knowledge and structures imparted below, make better, more conscious choices.

#### The Cycle of Choice



#### The Structure of Choice<sup>10</sup>

The cycle of choice begins when an event or circumstance presents itself, triggering the dominant perceptions or beliefs that we instantly — knowingly or unknowingly — associate with it. As this happens, “meaning” is created. This “meaning” causes a reaction-choice that leads to the actions and behaviors we take, which in turn influence the outcomes or results.

In addition to the dominant perceptions or beliefs (either limiting or empowering), as soon as an event occurs, other influencers (which operate within or outside our awareness) affect our choices. These are:

- Current frame of mind
- Past experiences and exposures
- Current circumstances
- Stress levels
- Fatigue levels
- Fears and worries

Being mindful means pausing and stepping back to identify the influencers that are rising up within us at the moment. Being informed means understanding that they are not who we are, they are simply influencers. And most importantly, acting from a state of informed mindfulness means that we can choose to be influenced or not.

<sup>10</sup>Note: This sections on CHOICE and LEADERSHIP (pages 8-22) are based on the work of Michael Aquilino, CEO of Innovational Services, Inc. Copyright 2017. It is used with permission.

Understanding the choices available to us in terms of emotional outlook, perspective and state of mind/being is crucial. We should ask ourselves: What are we truly reacting to? Is it real? What are the facts? What is influencing us in this moment?

This being said, understanding this process intellectually and being able to apply it in a timely fashion are two different things. As one of our colleagues said, “I am often way down the road before I realize I had a choice. How do I recognize it sooner?”

The only way to build greater awareness is through practice. Set the intention that one, two or five times a day you will deliberately stop, take a breath, and focus your awareness of what you are thinking, feeling, being and doing. When this becomes easy, make it ten times a day. The more you practice, the more this aware state will become your normal state.

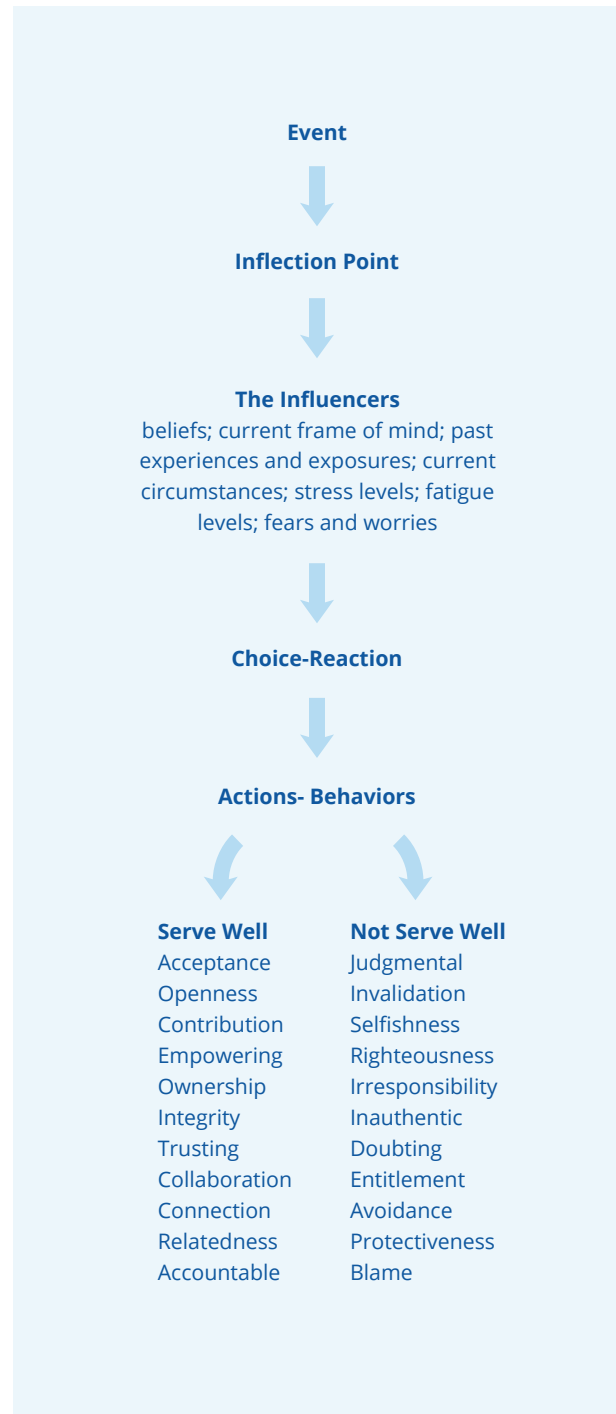
### Inflection Points

An “inflection point” is that series of moments that immediately follows an experience, exposure, situation or event. When any experience unfolds, our brains process it quickly and our response is often automatic. Following the cycle of choice, we then act “as if it is so.” It is during those critical moments of processing and formulating that the “Main Influencers” noted above come into play. The fact is, our assessment may be based on past (mis)perceptions and beliefs and the current situation may not be what we assume it to be.

Without taking pause to reflect on what “is” or “isn’t” present in those defining moments, we will unknowingly start down one of two paths. One path provides access to a set of actions and behaviors that will ultimately serve us well while the other path directs us to those actions

and behaviors that may not serve us well. The following chart outlines the typical behaviors that are adopted as one travels through the cycle of choice.

### Inflection Points and the Cycle of Choice



Imagine that you are at work and your new boss has requested a face-to-face meeting with you. Right now, in the very moment of reading this, what visual did you create? What did you think and what did you say to yourself? For purpose of this analogy, let's say in the past a previous boss mistreated you and was emotionally abusive. If the practice of mindfulness is not utilized when the request for the meeting is made (the inflection point), you could be off to the races about what it all means or how it is going to go. In addition, if you are tired or stressed and still harbor anger toward the former boss, the situation will begin to go awry even before it begins. These types of scenarios are quite predictable and unfold for us every day.

But what if, within this scenario, there was a mindful pause to truly consider what "is" or what "isn't" actually present — a practice that takes into account your frame of mind and emotional state as well as your preconceptions and beliefs. By mindfully pausing, you can witness how predisposed you are to an ensuing set of behaviors. And by following the cycle of choice out to its end, if your automatic reaction involves being judgmental, distrustful and resistant, you can predict the outcome of the meeting.

After pausing to reflect on "what is," what if you clearly had the awareness of how the "influencers" were in play and not serving you well? What if you made the active and intentional choice to bring a new outlook and a new set of actions and behaviors to the table? Let's say you shifted your perception of your relationships with your boss and approached the meeting with openness, collaboration and contribution. How well do you think the meeting would go with your new boss at that point? Mindfully pausing and reflecting on what is

truly present while intentionally choosing the set of behaviors and actions that will generate the desired result has a profound effect on the experience of your life's journey. It is not about being good or bad or right or wrong; rather, it is about developing the practice of becoming aware and informing ourselves within those critical moments of formulation.

### Reaction and Choice

The two diagrams on the following pages illustrate the influencers we often face and how, if we allow ourselves to be so influenced, they result in specific outcomes.

What is captured in each of the limiting and empowering diagrams is the thinking (the dominant perceptions or beliefs) which then leads to the actions and behaviors typically associated with that line of thinking which further leads to the dynamics and results.

Once a dominant thought or belief is present in a given situation, that dominant thought or belief takes over and guides our behaviors and actions. If the dominant perception is limiting — such as "I am not good enough" — then the behaviors will typically be about not being good enough as will the results. If the dominant belief is "I can do anything I set my mind to," a totally different set of actions and outcomes will follow. The key to making more aware choices is to look inward and examine how you "automatically" respond within any given situation.

These diagrams show us how we can use awareness and choice to shift limiting paradigms that are operating in our lives, therein enabling us to be better leaders.

## DOMINANT LIMITING PERCEPTIONS OR BELIEFS

**The Center** is the dominant perceptions or beliefs (the origin of automatic reaction and/or choice), as in the examples given on page 14.

**The First Zone** contains the common types of triggered automatic reactions or choices when a dominant limiting perception or belief is present.

**The Next Zone** contains the common actions and behaviors that show up.

**The Outer Zone** shows the dynamics, results or outcomes typically derived and most often present.



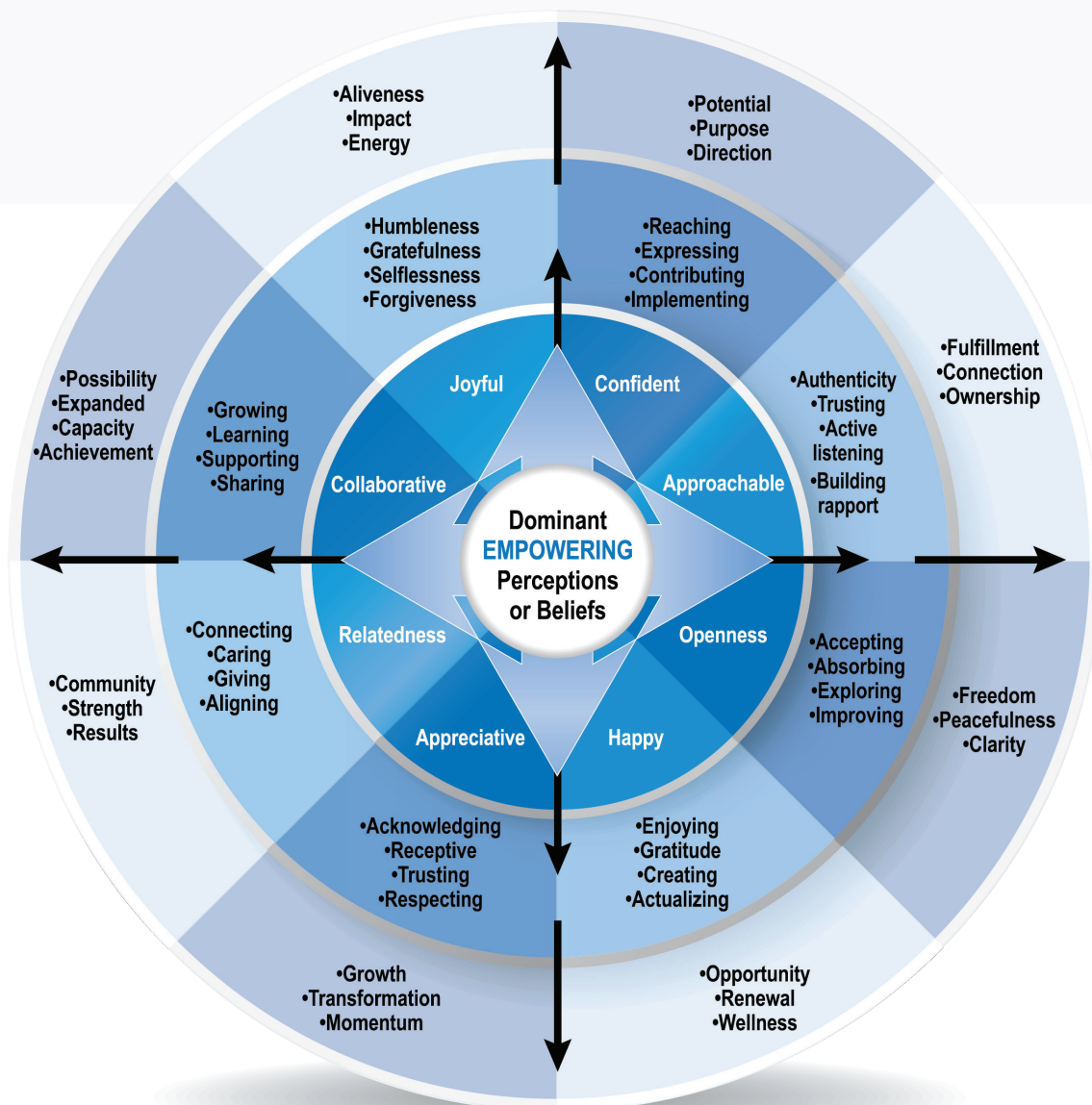
## DOMINANT EMPOWERING PERCEPTIONS OR BELIEFS

**The Center** is the dominant perceptions or beliefs (the origin of automatic reaction and/or choice), as in the examples given on page 14.

**The First Zone** contains the common types of triggered automatic reactions or choices when a dominant empowering perception or belief is present.

**The Next Zone** contains the common actions and behaviors that show up.

**The Outer Zone** shows the dynamics, results or outcomes typically derived and most often present.



Let's examine how these charts work. Below is a partial listing of the most common *dominant limiting perceptions or beliefs*:

- I am not worthy
- I am not good enough
- Why should I bother
- I need to prove
- I can't make a mistake
- I am not liked
- I can't because
- I am not heard
- I trust no one
- I am an imposter

Once clear about which of these or some combination of them may be in play, you can use the diagram to see the most typical responses. In addition, the diagram also points to the actions predominantly associated with those responses and the nature of the results you can expect.

When applying this to your life, the best place to begin is to look at results as they are a direct reflection of what is in play. If you often find yourself angry, distrustful, judgmental, withdrawn and/or shut down, then some form of dominant limiting perception or belief is at work. Noticing it is the first step toward accessing new perceptions, beliefs, set of actions and behaviors.

What you bring to the table in any given situation is usually how it will wind up. It is all in the approach. Making a favorable choice is simply about clarity and repeated action.

Consider the transformative power of awareness and choice if the dominant perceptions or beliefs are *empowering*. It works in the same exact manner. Here is a partial listing of the most common *dominant*

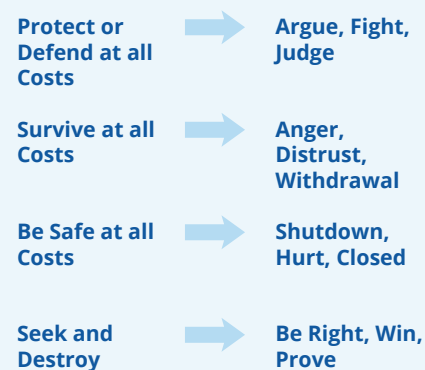
*empowering perceptions or beliefs*:

- I am grateful
- I am confident and clear
- I allow myself to be
- I am open and vulnerable
- I learn from mistakes
- I am making a difference
- I have purpose and meaning
- I have much to contribute
- I trust within myself and others
- I am accepting and appreciative

Just like limiting beliefs, empowering perceptions and beliefs also exert an influence. Once you focus on the beliefs and attitudes that will serve you well, refer to the diagram. You will find the corresponding actions and behaviors along with the expected results.

The important thing to remember is to apply this process regularly and often until such time that you experience a difference in the way you feel and in the outcomes derived.

### Sample Progression of Automatic Limiting Reactions-Choices





As we have learned, when we encounter different experiences, our responses are frequently “automatic” in nature. Because they are typically acted upon without thought, our actual level of awareness (what we know) is relatively low. But recognizing one or more of these belief-begets-behavior patterns in ourselves — a judgmental attitude leads to blaming others; distrust leads to overprotectiveness — will inform our awareness and we will begin to know what we didn’t know we didn’t know.

After all, it is not what we know that gets in our way; often it is what we don’t know we don’t know.

When you experience an automatic reaction, be mindful of when you are protecting or defending. It shows up as arguing, judging or fighting. Another common automatic reaction is to survive at all costs. The behaviors of such desperate survival instincts are to distrust, withdraw and even to become angry. Staying safe at all costs or holding on way too tight is another form of reaction that leads to shut down, hurt and being closed. Last, there is the reaction of seek and destroy. The dominant need to be right or to win and to prove is seemingly relentless. The relevant insight is that they all have an energy about them that influences us in a very real way.

Within automatic reactions and choices there will be a prevailing dominant perception or belief that is driving the energy it contains. Bringing awareness to the non-awareness of what is in play can dramatically shift the feelings, behaviors and results. Working to uncover what is triggering your “automatic” reactions can be life-changing.

There are several key factors involved in this

process that need to be kept in mind. The very nature of human nature is such that we have tremendous resistance to “letting go.” One of the strongest fears is the fear of the unknown. When we know, even if it does not work for us, at least we know, and that provides a feeling of safety. We understand what to expect and how it will play out. Being conscious of when we are resisting “letting go” can help us get past that barrier.

### **The Three Conduits of Effective Leadership**

The inner most zones on the *empowering* diagram contain the states of being or mind sets that lead to positive behaviors that, in turn, give rise to positive results. Three of them — relatedness, discipline and openness — are particularly useful to improve the effectiveness of leadership.

**Relatedness** is when you are with someone without the fear of being judged or assessed in any way at any time. When high levels of relatedness, connection, trust and acceptance are present, anything is possible. Think of that best friend you have who shows up in your life every once in a while. The moment they show up you just pick right up where you left off as if not a day has passed. That is a demonstration of a high level of relatedness. There is no judgment of one another — there is just being present.

On the flip side, think of a person at work for whom you don’t care. (By the way, they probably don’t like you either.) Struggle, upset, lack of results and so much more are present. Within low levels of relatedness, very little is possible.

Your level of awareness/non-awareness about your degree of relatedness as a leader plays a key role in obtaining results. Consider the relationships you have in the world of work.



What level of relatedness do you have with those on your playing field? Rate the degree of relatedness you have with each of your key relationships on a scale of 1-10. Isn't it interesting how those that are below a 5 are the ones that cause the most difficulty, take up most of your time and produce the least amount of results? And yet, those that are 10's are smooth sailing — things just seem to flow.

In applying the process of awareness to the state of relatedness with those who are 5 and below, you may find that there was or still is an "automatic" in play coupled with some of the influencers shown in the structure of choice. Perhaps you feel the individual is not trustworthy? Referring to the diagram, you will see how that dominant limiting belief or perception plays out in actions and behaviors, such as building evidence to prove your case or putting up emotional and mental walls. You will also see the nature of the results you can expect.

There are huge costs involved with those "5 and below" relatedness situations. Most likely the tangible deliverables are lacking and the cost of the emotional investment you must continually make is quite high.

Effective leaders are aware that the process of transforming the level and degree of relatedness starts within themselves. The key is to start with understanding "what is" and truly capture it. You must first see the problem before you can go about working to correct it. What exactly is the dominant limiting perception or belief that is driving the 5? If you accurately capture the perception and examine the corresponding actions and behaviors, you should clearly see why any relatedness had very little room to exist. You now have awareness, and with awareness you can begin to have

access to choice and a means to mindfully transform the relationship and corresponding results.

A good first step is to validate what is right about the team member. Find something to like or admire about them. You should also have a conversation about the dynamics that are present and secure a commitment from the team member to try a new set of actions. You can do this by having them study the diagram showing the dominant empowering perceptions or beliefs. They should choose one or a combination that fits best and then work to take the actions shown — not once but many times. Think of it as building a muscle. Gradually the new behaviors will take hold and the degree of relatedness will shift, and when it does, there will be an improvement in results as well as a transformation of outlook, feelings and energy.

We should point out, however, that after you have tried to raise the level of relatedness, have talked with the team member and taken him or her through these behavior change steps and it is not working, the correct answer might be to take disciplinary action or let the person go. You cannot change the basic nature of someone who is not open to it. So if you have the awareness that there are clear trust or security issues that are not changing, the situation needs to be dealt with in a way that best benefits the entire organization.

For example, if you are dealing with an employee who simply cannot meet deadlines, which detrimentally effects all those connected to his or her project, you may have a situation in which the employee is simply not capable of doing the job. No amount of relatedness will change that fact, but a higher degree of relatedness will help you move the team member to a more suitable position or to let

them go altogether in a way that is not harmful.

This process of building relatedness is not a “one and done” sort of thing. Mindfully practice building your awareness of your relatedness while applying new sets of actions and behaviors. Give it time to take hold. Also keep in mind that the primary conduit to transforming relatedness is forgiveness.

**Discipline** is a process of training yourself to follow rules of behavior that support being true to your word and fulfilling your intentions. Some of these behaviors include organizing, structuring, delivering, implementing and working within a framework. Blame is typically not one of the behavioral rules of highly disciplined leaders.

The awareness/non-awareness cycle of discipline also plays a key role in obtaining (or not obtaining) results. There are two sides to this state that are important to highlight. The first is that discipline is something that you do with awareness, such as getting organized and focused and then implementing the plan. The second is that discipline is more of a way of being than of doing. It is a deep-rooted sense of ownership, commitment, integrity and accountability that leads to a consistent set of behaviors. For those who are highly disciplined, it is something that becomes part of their very fiber. There is no thinking or evaluating involved, it just is.

One of the best indicators to gauge awareness or non-awareness about discipline are the results. When you examine closely those areas in your organization where you truly want results but have not been able to achieve them, you will often find that the underlying key rests within the degree of discipline exercised. But it may not be so obvious. In fact, you could be unaware of the degree of non-awareness you have about discipline. For example, if you believe that you

are the most disciplined person in the world and yet you are having issues with time management, perhaps it is time to consider becoming aware. Time is not the issue; it is the discipline of how and where time is used or not used that is creating the issues.

To shift the results and build the muscles of awareness and choice concerning discipline, you must first be clear about the reality of “what is.” The key is to capture what you are telling yourself about being disciplined. Once you are clear about it, you will see that there is a dominant limiting perception or belief in play such as “I don’t need to do that” or “I don’t want to waste my time on that,” and you will then be able to see how that may not be serving you well.

After putting a framework around what you are telling yourself and capturing how you behave or act within that belief, you then have access to choice. How do you want it to be? Refer to the diagram of behaviors and actions and choose what will reset your course as it relates to discipline.

Think of building the muscles of awareness and choice with regard to discipline as a process. It’s not like you pick up the barbell once and suddenly you have all the muscles you need in life. It requires application, consistency and repetition to achieve sustainable results.

**Openness** is the freedom of allowing without barriers. Without being judgmental or engaging in predetermination, one offers transparency, access and acceptance.

The awareness/non-awareness cycle of openness plays a significant role in our every interaction. It is highly personal as we all have a wide variety of unique experiences, exposures, situations and occurrences.

Focusing on the concept of awareness/non-awareness, it is important to consider your “automatic” response to the question of openness. When asked, almost everyone will say “of course I am open.” But in reality, we may not be as open as we think.

To understand your degree of awareness or non-awareness, start by capturing your thoughts concerning the openness you bring to the table. Are you an accepting person? Are you absorbing input from others? Do you openly explore ideas with others? These are all keys to knowing how dialed in you truly are.

We can also learn through demonstrated actions and behaviors. We have all heard the expression that “actions speak louder than words.” Do your actions speak to a high level of openness or do they reflect being closed?

Access to choice always involves knowing where you stand in a factual, aware way.

The transformative actions associated with this are to first get clear within yourself, then genuinely request open and honest feedback of those around you. Openness is one of those things that is derived from within but also shows up in the eyes and ears of others. Be sure to provide safe harbor. If the feedback you receive contains a repeated pattern of perceptions or facts that differ from your own perceptions of yourself, it may be time for self-reflection.

The best litmus test is vulnerability. Vulnerability is the conduit to possibility and successful outcomes. True vulnerability demonstrates authenticity, approachability and real openness. Capture the raw truth of it, and find the actions and behaviors that are connected with the dominant perception in play. Reflect upon it. Is it serving you well? If not, you then have access to

choice and an awareness from which to act.

To reiterate, you can break the automatic cycle and begin to act deliberately by stepping away from the automatic reaction (put it on pause) and asking yourself: Will that path serve me well or not serve me well? What are the costs associated with that path? Will I be satisfied with the results? In other words, challenge your beliefs that are driving your reactions and ultimately your actions.

True power is always within the reaction-choice. We either give our power away or gain it in the moment.

### In Summary

The cycle of choice begins when an event or circumstance presents itself, triggering the dominant perceptions or beliefs that we instantly associate with it. As this happens, “meaning” is created. This “meaning” causes a reaction-choice that leads to the actions and behaviors we take, which in turn derives the outcomes or results.

When you find yourself reacting to an event or circumstance, pause to reflect on “what is” and how the “influencers” are in play. Find yourself on one of the charts – either limiting or empowering. If you are not headed in a beneficial direction, look at the empowering diagram, study the action items and make an intentional choice to bring a new outlook and a new set of actions and behaviors to the situation. For instance, if you want growth, you need to be appreciative. If you want joy, you need to be grateful. The actions lead to outcomes.

Mindfully pausing and reflecting on what is truly present while intentionally choosing the set of behaviors and actions that will generate the desired result has a profound effect on the experience of your life’s journey.

## SECTION THREE

## Leadership

*There is profound power in  
your own intentions and purpose.*

In conjunction with understanding the three conduits of effective leadership — relatedness, discipline and openness — you should be aware of your style of leadership as this awareness is vital for the achievement of sustainable results. For the purpose of this discussion, there are two styles: leadership that fosters *dependent behaviors* and leadership that fosters *self-directed* behaviors.

Making a choice of which leadership style to use leads to one of two very distinctive sets of experiences for both the leader and their organization.

### Dependent Leadership

*Dependent leadership* brings about the perception or belief that everything is “handled” because it is all being monitored or controlled by the leader. In certain situations, it may be necessary to do this to bring order from chaos; however, it may serve you better to have that be the exception rather than the rule. In the long run, there are many unforeseen pitfalls associated with the actions and behaviors of the leader who chooses to operate in this manner.

Many leaders use the *dependent leadership* style because it is all they know or it is how they feel it is supposed to be done. Others feel, “If I want it done right and done right the first time, I have to do it myself.” Some leaders find it scary to entrust others or even to allow room for others to exist. However, there are

several trust issues in play within these thought patterns. The underlying driver is often a lack of trust in the capabilities of those around you. But rather than placing blame elsewhere, you should first question your own accountability. That awareness will give you access to choice and provide a set of steps to implement. The key is to truly reflect upon the situation and use the diagrams to see if and how you are creating trust issues around yourself.

The pitfalls that inevitably unfold concern your own credibility. The three cornerstones of effective leadership are credibility, reliability, and trustworthiness. Regrettably, what transpires within the dependent style of leadership is that you will eventually reach capacity. There will be more demand than you can handle, despite what the ego may be telling you. Invariably, once that threshold is reached, many unpleasant, ineffective, and destructive dynamics begin to show up. Deadlines are missed, anxiety runs high, breakdowns of communication begin to occur, burnout starts to set in, work-life balance goes out of whack, overwhelm takes hold and organizational or team morale begins to fade. All of which erode your credibility, reliability, and trustworthiness as a leader. This slippery slope often evolves into finding fault with or invalidating others, either of which can be hard to recover from.

If you are aware, you will see these behaviors in your daily interactions. Do the members of

your team seek your permission to do things? Does almost everything need to pass through you prior to being done? Do you find yourself doing more telling than asking? If so, you may be experiencing the dynamics outlined above. Improving the situation is a matter of bringing awareness to it and accessing choice.

### **Leadership that Fosters Self-Directed Behavior**

You may find the leadership style of fostering *self-directed behaviors* more advantageous and more fulfilling. One of the primary differences between the two styles is the opportunity for expanded capacity through improved efficiency.

Leadership is not bestowed because of a title or role. It is a way of being. Leaders who foster self-directed behaviors clearly define expectations, speak openly about accountability, accept responsibility and ownership, empower others, evoke excellence, and bring about a learning environment with continuous improvement. This style of leadership has a significantly different energy and feel to it for both the leader and members of the team. The other major behavior connected with this style is a continual focus on appreciating and validating what is right.

Human nature being what it is, we all experience the fact that what we are thinking about brings on more of what we are thinking about. This is why you should work continuously to validate what is right within others and throughout the organization. In effect, this can transform an entire culture, increase efficiencies across the board and spur a contagious momentum of achievement.

The most interesting aspect of this is that it all starts with you. A choice you can make immediately is that when someone on the

team approaches you with a problem or if they are seeking approval or permission, instead of becoming the “play caller,” you pause to bring awareness to the moment and access choice. Ask the individual what it is they think should be done. It’s as simple as that — less telling and more asking in those moments.

Observe their initial reaction as it will help you to understand how much work you may need to do with this aspect of effectiveness as a leader. If they seem confused or stopped by the question, simply ask again. Actively listen to their response and if it is on point simply say, “That is exactly what I would do.” Repetitive application of this technique will leave those around you feeling engaged and involved. Another benefit is that eventually those very same team members will bring solutions instead of problems, which in turn leads to improved efficiencies across the board. Empowerment will also bring about respect, connection and a sense of team.

As mentioned earlier, it is the consistency of application that will transform and empower those around you. Be aware that most people have joined an organization or engage in the world of work because they want to be part of something and want to have a voice or influence over an outcome. Allow room for others to exist and you will see a path to expanded capacity. Be aware that for most accountable people, the greatest learning we have had is from our mistakes. An effective leader who is fostering self-directed behaviors will process mistakes or missteps as a learning experience rather than as an indictment or invalidation.

### **A Framework of Expectations**

One golden rule of effective leadership is that having a structure or framework to operate within is imperative for mastery and successful

outcomes. A framework is the basic structure that underlies a system or concept. For instance, your framework for communications may include instructions about the use of a logo, a commitment to excellence (no typos) and rules around who is included in memos and review. Invariably, if something is unsuccessful or falls short, you will find that within the framework something was overlooked or circumvented. This also holds true for the day-to-day tasks as well as the overall goals of your organization. Although there may be a framework utilized for your projects and tasks, do you have clear expectations and have they been expressed? Expectations play a key role in effective leadership. A common denominator of human nature is that when expectations are left unmet, we tend to become upset or concerned. Some leaders express their expectations on an incident by incident basis while others may be unclear about their expectations, even for themselves. But it is vitally important to bring awareness to the act of managing expectations.

Start by examining what values or standards you have chosen to embrace. Take time to commit them to written form and review them to ensure you have captured all of them. You are now beginning to build the framework around expectations. Once complete, meet with your team members and share clearly what your expectations are concerning interaction, relationships, communication and other key dynamics. Language shapes our world so be certain to use precise wording, leaving nothing open to interpretation. This step is too often overlooked — but don't assume that others will just know your exact expectations. Be aware that in the absence of knowing, people will associate their own meaning, which may not always be aligned with your thinking. The assumption that others simply know is the origin of most communication breakdowns.

There is another aspect of framework building that is overlooked by leaders in most organizations. Although it is great that you are now clear about your expectations and have expressed them to the members of your team, you are only half done. An effective leader will take it one step further. Once the expectations discussion is complete, ask the team members what their expectations are of you. This can be unsettling for a leader. It does, however, demonstrate openness, approachability, and vulnerability. In turn, demonstrating those three traits will foster respect, authenticity, and loyalty. For some team members, it may be very confusing as they most likely have never been asked that by the “boss” before. Give them time on their own to develop their expectations, ask that they commit them to writing and then set a time to walk through them together. In the follow-up meeting, ask if they have any questions or concerns about the expectations you previously shared. Then ask them to present their expectations of you. Actively listen, and in any area that seems unclear, inquire until there is clarity. Once complete, the team member will feel heard, valued, and confident. You now have an expressed framework from which each of you can operate. Use these expectations as the guidelines for relationship and performance. When an issue unfolds at any future point, go back to the agreed upon expectations as the focal point for learning. By following this structure, a great deal of organizational noise will subside, allowing room for everyone to be more present to what needs to be done and less worried about what everything may or may not mean.

### **The Velocity of Intention and Purpose**

There is profound truth to the power of your own intentions and purpose. Be aware that “as you say it, so it shall be.” Awareness and application of this vital principle is paramount to achievement and success.



Are you doing what you do simply to do it, or are you heading somewhere? Do you have absolute clarity of your intention? Can you visualize your potential? Not just for the moment but in the long view, which involves meaning and purpose in life. Without question, having clarity about this will serve as your primary dominant empowering perception and belief. It will inform all your choices, actions, behaviors and results. It can also serve as a constant beacon in life to keep you focused and on track during those times when you may knowingly or unknowingly veer off the path. When you truly lock in on it,

you will notice it delivers resolve — the kind associated with getting goose bumps — and you experience an energy and a noticeable rise in velocity.

In summary, mindfully work to let go of the dominant limiting perceptions that don't serve you well. Allow yourself to be and seek to employ the dominant empowering perceptions, behaviors and actions. In doing so you will find momentum, unforeseen possibility and the realization of true potential. And others will be compelled to follow you.

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## Author Bios

### Michael C. Aquilino

An *Effective Leader* understands and fully resonates with the principles of integrative leadership, as well as the organizational and interpersonal context in which they must function. Michael brings this understanding within his Leadership Development and Organizational Development programs when teaching and fostering the skills that inspire transformation and create new ways of thinking. As President and CEO of Innovational Services, Michael has worked across many sectors—healthcare, technology, manufacturing, banking, finance, pharmaceutical and energy. His expertise in Leadership Development, Organizational Development and Executive Coaching stems from his experience of partnering with top executives, leaders and leadership teams throughout the country and helping them realize their potential. His expertise also includes extensive work in the areas of executive career transition, career development and corporate outplacement.

For more than 30 years, Michael has helped individuals and organizations, ranging from multi-billion dollar global companies to start-up organizations, to revolutionize their culture, business and results. An accomplished public speaker, Michael has presented for organizations such as the YPO, Temple University, New Jersey Department of Labor, Comcast, the University of Pennsylvania Hospital, Huron Consulting, Bucks & Montgomery County Human Resource Association, Pitcairn Financial Group, and the Women's Regional Business Council. He has been heard on many radio stations including

KYW, WWDB and WPEN, published in the *Philadelphia Inquirer's* Career Builder, featured on [www.philly.com](http://www.philly.com) as an expert in career-related matters, and appeared on television on the Comcast Network.

In the healthcare sector, his work includes partnering with organizations such as The UltraWellness Center and Northwestern Medical Center as well as Duke Integrative Medicine. Outside of the healthcare sector, his work includes partnering with Accenture, the Wm. Wrigley Jr. Company, Ashley Furniture, University of Pennsylvania, Temple University, Drexel University, Comcast, Pitcairn Financial, Huron Consulting, Morgan Properties, Clark Capital Management, The Philadelphia Inquirer, Impax Laboratories, Deloitte and other organizations.

He was a contributor to "*The Pebble in the Pond*," a widely-accepted whitepaper covering the topics of informed mindfulness and integrative leadership. His recent publications include "Developing the 'Informed' of Informed Mindfulness One Step at a Time," "How Strong is Your R Factor?" and "Hiding in Plain Sight."

Michael is part of the core faculty of the Leadership Program in Integrative Healthcare at Duke University and is the program's facilitator. In addition, he created an innovative program called "The R Factor" which specifically focuses on helping individuals navigate their way through the challenges associated with



compassion, fatigue, lack of balance, overwhelm and burn out. The program takes a deep dive into the thinking and action steps that may be taken to transform life's experience.

With expertise, he shares vision, insights and strategies to instill several key qualities required to be an *Effective Leader*. Michael's skill set ensures that participants in his programs are prepared for next-level performance by evolving their leadership abilities in a way that is designed to evoke excellence and improve results. His passion and dedication to helping others find freedom in their thinking is apparent in all that he does. As a highly intuitive individual, Michael has the unique ability to hear the unsaid more than the said. His life's work and sense of purpose focuses on partnering to unlock human potential with individuals, teams and organizations until their true intentions become realized.

### Bonnie J. Horrigan

Bonnie J Horrigan is the Executive Director of ML Films, Inc., a nonprofit that works to improve the health of the American public.

Horrigan worked for The Bravewell Collaborative, a philanthropic organization dedicated to transforming healthcare for over a decade, the last four years of which she served as its Executive Director. In addition to her work with ML Films, she currently serves as core faculty for the Leadership Program in Integrative Healthcare at Duke University and is the Editor of their e-newsletter, *Integrative Leadership*. She is also the Editorial Director for the medical journal *EXPLORE: The Journal of Science and Healing* and the Editor of the Academic Consortium for Integrative Medicine & Health's *Breaking News Briefing* e-newsletter.

Horrigan is the author of three books: *Red Moon Passage* (Harmony, 1996); *Voices of Integrative Medicine: Conversations and Encounters* (Elsevier Science, 2003); and *The Bravewell Story: How a Small Community of Philanthropists Made a Big Difference in Healthcare* (Academic Consortium for Integrative Medicine & Health, 2016). She has published more than 200 articles in such places as *Spirituality & Health*; *Science & Spirit*; *The Inner Edge*; *Advances in Mind Body Medicine*; *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine*; *EXPLORE: The Journal of Science and Healing*; *Hospitals and Health Networks Daily*; and *San Diego Magazine*, among others. She has also penned several national reports, including *Best Practices in Integrative Medicine* and *Integrative Medicine in America*.

### Adam Perlman, MD, MPH

Adam Perlman, MD, MPH, is currently the CEO and co-founder of Synchronicity, a Charleston, South Carolina, company developing next-generation well-being centers. He is also an adjunct Associate Professor of Medicine at Duke University, and from 2011 until 2017 was the Associate Vice President for Health and Wellness for the Duke University Health System, as well as Executive Director for Duke Integrative Medicine. As such, he had responsibility for Duke's Health and Wellness portfolio, including Duke Integrative Medicine, the Duke Diet and Fitness Center, and the Duke Health and Fitness Center. Additionally, he is the Founder and Director of the Leadership Program in Integrative Healthcare at Duke University.

Dr. Perlman is past Chair for the Academic Consortium for Integrative Medicine and Health, which is comprised of more than 75 leading academic medical centers around the country. Prior to his work with Duke, Dr. Perlman was Executive Director for the Institute for Complementary and Alternative Medicine at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, where he was Associate Professor of Medicine. He held the UMDNJ Hunterdon Endowed Professorship in Complementary and Alternative Medicine and was Chair for the Department of Primary Care within the School of Health-Related Professions, overseeing the Physician Assistant and Respiratory Care Programs.

Dr. Perlman also served as Director of Integrative Medicine for the Saint Barnabas Health Care System and was founding Medical Director for the Carol and Morton Siegler Center for Integrative Medicine, in Livingston, New Jersey. In that role, he had primary responsibility for developing and overseeing the Complementary & Alternative Medicine Program, including one of the first hospital-based Integrative Medicine Centers in the country as well as the Center for Health and Wellness.

Dr. Perlman received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Tufts University and his Doctor of Medicine from Boston University School of Medicine, completing residencies in Internal Medicine and Preventive Medicine as well as a General Internal Medicine Research Fellowship at Boston Medical Center. He earned his Master of Public Health from the Boston University School of Public Health.

Dr. Perlman lectures widely and is a frequently featured media expert. His scholarly activities include numerous grants and publications. Dr. Perlman's research has been published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* and featured in the *New York Times*.

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