

# Advance Testimonials for Embracing Senior Leadership

*I strongly endorse this book and its relevance for senior leaders or those aspiring to become senior leaders. Jim Browning has amassed a comprehensive, in-depth delineation of the critical skills and perspectives senior leaders need to achieve success ranging from driving performance through complete organizational transformation.*

**Mark Gerencser**

Chairman of UMUC Ventures; Chairman of Business Executives for National Security, board member, Alion Science & Technology Corp; former Executive Vice President, Booz Allen Hamilton; coauthor *Megacommunities*

*A superbly crafted and comprehensive exposition of leadership demands and techniques at the highest levels. Invaluable and directly applicable to comprehending and building the skills for success in today's rapidly changing world!*

**Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Jr. PhD, VADM, USN, Ret.**

CEO, GeoOptics, Inc.; former Administrator, The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

*"Embracing Senior Leadership" is an important and unique book. Superbly written, it provides definitive insights and practical actions that will not only help you climb your organization's leadership ladder but set yourself up to thrive at the senior level.*

**Cynthia Valles**

Executive Vice President, American Express,  
International Operations and Customer Service

*I was extremely fortunate to review Jim Browning's insightful and superbly written book prior to my being selected to join the Governor of Alabama's cabinet. Without question, this book was "spot on" and greatly facilitated my successful transition. I keep the book handy as it is filled with significant gems and pearls that I continue to use today. This book is imperative for any leader aspiring to become a senior leader or transitioning into a senior leader position.*

**Brian Hastings**

Director of the Emergency Management Agency, State of Alabama;  
former Commandant, Air Command and Staff College,  
and Vice Commander, Spaatz Center for Officer Education, Air University

*Jim Browning delivers on his promise to provide a compelling read on senior leadership by not only sharing the thoughts of executives and senior leaders with the reader, but also engaging the reader's reflections on key issues senior leaders encounter, as well as examine their own readiness to take on a leadership role in their organization.*

**Dan Cohen**

Retired Principal, Deloitte Consulting; author of *The Heart of Change Field Guide*; co-author of the international best-selling business book, *The Heart of Change* with Harvard Professor John Kotter

*"Embracing Senior Leadership" is required reading for any new executive or senior leader, and especially for those aspiring to positions of increased responsibility. It is simply the most authoritative book on successful leadership that has yet been written—highlighted by golden advice and perspectives from successful executives and senior leaders representing business, government, military, and nonprofit organizations. More importantly, it is a powerful guide for both seasoned and aspirational senior leaders to help prepare them for success.*

**Tracy Daniel Connors, PhD**

President, BelleAire Press, publisher of the first handbooks for nonprofit management and volunteer resource development, and developer of the first graduate program in charitable-philanthropic organization management

*Jim Browning has addressed a clear gap in our understanding of how to lead large organizations. While leadership styles shouldn't change as we move to the top, the skillsets for success are measurably different. This is an essential book for all aspiring senior leaders.*

**Thomas B. Fargo, ADM, USN, Ret.**

Chairman of the Board, United Services Automobile Association (USAA), former CEO and President of HSF Holdings; former Chairman of the Board, Huntington Ingalls Industries; former Commander, US Pacific Command

*This book weaves essential insights and actions that are significant and relevant for effective senior leadership in any organization or country. Senior leadership on a strategic level is a fascinating assignment and a multidimensional challenge. This book gives you comprehensive insights into all the dimensions that really matter.*

**Peter Schlote**

Managing Director of Hensoldt Sensory GmbH, Ulm, Germany; former CEO of Tesat-Spacecom GmbH & Co.KG, Backnang, Germany

*Jim Browning's book is a superb guide for any leader at any level. It is concise, comprehensive, engaging, and important. A masterpiece which I would have loved to have had in my possession a few years ago as I assumed senior-level positions.*

**Raymond E. Bell, Jr., PhD, BG, USA, Ret.**

Author; former Commander 5th Psychological Operations Group; Commanding General 220th Military Police Brigade

*Senior leaders who are prepared to rewrite the rules for work will create organizations that transform industries, societies, and the lives of those who work within them. This unique and essential book provides the roadmap for doing just that.*

**Renee Cullinan**

CEO, Stop Meeting Like This

*This is not your typical “how-to” leadership manual. It assumes that you already know a lot from your experiences. This authoritative book provides substantial practical advice on how to succeed in an environment that is qualitatively different from anything you have experienced before. If you want to succeed at the senior level, it is imperative you read this book.*

**Robert Loftis, Ambassador**

Director of Graduate Studies, Professor of the Practice,  
Pardee School of Global Studies, Boston University; former head of reconstruction and  
stabilization and lead status of forces negotiator, US Department of State

*Jim Browning’s unique and powerful book synthesizes the critical aspects of senior leadership work, and the practical insights and actions provided are universally applicable and relevant regardless of the type of organization; or country, language, or culture in which the organization resides. I enthusiastically recommend this significant book for all leaders, but especially for those aspiring to become senior leaders.*

**John Matheny**

Former senior leader in the office of Secretary of Defense;  
former senior military adviser to two US Vice Presidents;  
former nonprofit executive

*Though Dr. Jim Browning’s unique book is targeted for those leaders and managers aspiring to become senior leaders, or support senior leaders, or who are already senior leaders, this book is an indispensable guide for success that any leader or manager at any organizational level or size of organization will find beneficial—be it a business, government, nonprofit, or military organization.*

**James V. Koch, PhD**

Board of Visitors Professor of Economics and  
President Emeritus, Old Dominion University; co-author  
with Jim Fisher, *Presidential Leadership*

*Many leaders ascending to the senior level are thrown into the fray and asked to “sink or swim.” They must lead and learn simultaneously and unfortunately, some will drown. Aspiring senior leaders thirst for a guide to help*

*them prepare for and stay afloat in navigating the turbulent, swirling waters faced at the senior level. Jim Browning's remarkable book provides the solutions they are craving for.*

**Linda Jacobs Washington**

President & CEO, The Washington Consulting Team;  
former Assistant Secretary for Administration,  
US Department of Transportation

*The high failure rate of much needed experienced, talented, and seasoned leaders is a travesty—especially in today's volatile, unstable world. A world devastated by the Covid-19 pandemic that sorely needs such talent and leadership. We MUST have some solutions for these vexing leadership issues. As a recognized leadership authority, Dr. Jim Browning is the right person to bring forth these solutions. His "Embracing Senior Leadership" provides answers craved by leaders both today and the foreseeable future.*

**Patty Duffey**

Former Foodservice Executive, Marketing Consultant, Author

*Jim Browning provides a book for current and aspiring senior leaders and those who work with and support them. He distills what's known about leading at the top, informed by his varied experience—naval aviator, scholar, and organizational change agent—and that of our best-known senior leaders whom he interviewed. Bill Gates and Warren Buffet do not need this book. The rest of us do!*

**Tom Blau**

Extensive background as a senior leader in academia,  
government, and international business development

*Jim Browning's book is a must read for anyone moving up to a leadership position in any large or medium size organization.*

**Dave Zuercher**

Board Member Executive Service Corps of Southern California;  
former Executive Vice President, International  
and Insurance Services, Wells Fargo

*I found reading Dr. Jim Browning's powerful book to be truly enlightening, persuasive, and critically important to my learning and growth for success at the senior level. This timely book is critically important for Millennials who aspire to assume higher organizational leadership roles in the post-pandemic world.*

**COL Michael Harris, USA**

Military Faculty, Department of Security and Strategy  
National War College, Washington, DC

*As a consultant and coach to senior leaders both in Australia and New Zealand, I strongly endorse Dr. Jim Browning's well-written, crucially important, and relevant book. It is a must read for leaders at any organizational level and it will be enthusiastically received by leaders, managers, and academics in Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom.*

**Dan Riley PhD**

Leadership consultant to Australian and  
New Zealand leaders, retired Academic

*Jim Browning's book is insightful, relevant, and a must read for anyone seeking to lead at a senior level. If you want to climb your organization's leadership ladder to the top, you need to read and re-read this book! It is that important!*

**Joni Dowling, PhD**

CEO, Smart Factory Consulting Services

# **EMBRACING SENIOR LEADERSHIP**



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Three Critical Factors Needed  
to Reach the C-Suite and Thrive

James W. Browning



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*Embracing Senior Leadership:  
Three Critical Factors Needed to Reach the C-Suite and Thrive*

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*Selection to a senior-level position demonstrates  
faith and trust by others that you will deliver.  
This book serves as a guide to help you honor  
that trust and commitment.*



# Contents

*Why “This” Book?* *xvii*

## PART I

### **The Unique Work and Challenges of Senior-Level Work**

<b>Chapter 1: Tackling Senior-Level Challenges</b>	<b>3</b>
Facing the Wicked Strategic Environment	3
Solving the Seven Challenges	4
Exercising Strategic Leadership	12
Components of Strategic Leadership	12
<b>Chapter 2: Leading Strategically</b>	<b>17</b>
Assessing the External Environment	17
Discover the 8-Step Strategic Thinking Framework	18
<b>Chapter 3: Is There a Need for Change?</b>	<b>29</b>
8 Benefits for a Powerful Purpose/Mission	29
Creating, Shaping, and Communicating Your Vision	31
Formulating Your Coherent Strategy	34
Strategic Planning—Aligning Your Expectations, Goals, and Resources	39
<b>Chapter 4: Competencies Essential to Performing Senior-Level Work Well</b>	<b>43</b>
Strategic Senior Leader Competencies	43

8 Required Abilities for Success	44
Four Important Leadership Competencies	50
<b>Chapter 5: Build and Lead Your Senior Leadership Team and Shape Organizational Culture</b>	<b>57</b>
Don't Wait! Build and Lead Your Leadership Team	58
Building Your SLT	60
Shaping Organizational Culture to Support Your Strategy	66
<b>Chapter 6: Making Senior-Level Decisions</b>	<b>73</b>
Chet Huber: Decision-Making at OnStar	78
Managing Your Emotion in Decision Making	79
Evaluating the Ethical and Moral Implications of Your Decision Making	80
Enhancing Your Senior-Level Decision Making	82
<b>Chapter 7: Lead and Manage Organizational Transformation</b>	<b>87</b>
Transformational Change—Bill Rupp, CEO, Mayo Clinic Jacksonville	87
Leading and Managing Transformational Change	89
Driving Commitment	91
Embedding Behavior	97
Total Quality Management/Leadership—Example of Failed Transformation	99
<b>Chapter 8: Leading Strategically in a Crisis</b>	<b>103</b>
Preparing for a Crisis	106
Executing During a Crisis	110
Evaluating Following a Crisis	114

## PART II

### **Your Personal Readiness to Do Senior-Level Work**

Your Five Personal Dimensions	117
-------------------------------	-----

<b>Chapter 9: Cognitive Capacity at the Senior Level</b>	<b>119</b>
Skills Associated with Cognitive Capacity	119
Making Sense: The Significance of Your Frames of Reference and Mental Models	120
Three Forms of Intuition: Social, Expert, Inventive	130
The Influence and Impact of Biases	133
<b>Chapter 10: Equally Important Personal Dimensions Required at the Senior Level</b>	<b>135</b>
Social Capacity	135
Skills Associated with Social Capacity	136
Personal Traits, Values, and Preferences	142
Examples of Competencies and Elements Associated with Leadership Traits	142
Technical Skills and Business Acumen	145
Examples of Competencies Related to Technical Skills and Business Acumen	147
Behavioral Capacity	148
Examples of Competencies and Elements Related to Behavioral Capacity	148
<b>Chapter 11: Wisdom, Executive Presence, and Enhancing Your Personal Dimensions</b>	<b>151</b>
Cultivating Wisdom	151
Projecting Executive Presence	153
Enhancing Your Personal Dimensions	156
Self-Awareness—Critical to Your Learning, Growth, and Success	161

PART III

**You're Selected for a Senior Leadership Position—Now What?**

<b>Chapter 12: Preparing Your Transition</b>	<b>169</b>
----------------------------------------------	------------

<b>Chapter 13: First Year Tactics for Success</b>	<b>183</b>
<b>Final Thoughts</b>	<b>199</b>
<b>Appendix A: The Buzzsaw Model of Strategic Leadership</b>	<b>203</b>
<b>Appendix B: Factors Derailing Senior Leaders</b>	<b>211</b>
<b>Appendix C: Techniques for Building Rapport and Collaborative Relationships</b>	<b>215</b>
<b>Appendix D: Assessing Your New Organization</b>	<b>219</b>
Key Area 1: Senior Strategic Leadership and Management	220
Key Area 2: Organizational Design and Structure	225
Key Area 3: Human Resources and Intellectual Capital	226
Key Area 4: Mission-Critical and Supporting Processes	229
Key Area 5: Technology and Security	230
Key Area 6: Financials and Resource Allocations	231
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	233
<i>Meet the Author</i>	235
<i>Endnotes</i>	237

# Why “This” Book?

*I thought I was prepared to hit the ground running when I was selected for a senior-level position. Unfortunately, through my mistakes and misjudgments, I experienced first-hand a rough transition. Though I was able to learn and recover, for more than a year I felt I was walking on eggshells. I experienced enormous stress and anxiety as some executives sought my removal from the position.*

—An Experienced Senior Leader

***Embracing Senior Leadership* provides you the answers.** The essential insights and practical actions provided will prevent similar rough transition experiences **and, more importantly, help you find the keys to the necessary knowledge, power, and motivation to reach the senior level, to grasp the leadership reins, and thrive!**

Whether you aspire to be a senior leader, supporting a senior leader, a senior leader, Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO), or an executive coach, **this book is for you.**

As a senior leader, you are responsible for the lives and livelihoods of those who work for you and those affected by the success or failure of your organization. This is a tremendous responsibility.

*Unfortunately, senior leaders are struggling—many are failing and losing their tenure at an alarming rate.* Those assisting senior leaders are also struggling in their efforts to be valuable supporters.

Being unprepared can have devastating consequences. For example, despite demonstrating proven leadership abilities in their previous positions, the National Association of Corporate Directors report “that in the first year and a half in a new role, 50 percent to 70 percent of executive

leaders recruited both internally and externally fail.”<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, research shows these high failure rates are more common if you skip one or two leadership levels when elevated to a top spot.<sup>2</sup>

Senior leader failures also devastate their organizations. For most organizations, the failure of a new executive placed into a critical leadership position will likely cost these organizations tens of millions of dollars, e.g., the costs of selecting, hiring, onboarding, and severance packages for many corporate executives. Such failures can disrupt ongoing strategies, team members’ performance, and widespread morale.

These shocking numbers lead to the question, “Why is this happening?”

While there are myriad performance and behavioral issues in play, in essence, and simply, most of these floundering senior leaders *are unprepared for senior leadership’s unique roles and responsibilities and the strategic challenges they face.*

Today and for the foreseeable future, you must lead in a world unlike anything anyone has ever experienced. You will face unprecedented demands and challenges from both inside and outside of your organization.

Most organizations are going through continuous churning—accelerating digital and technology disruptions, changing workplaces (remote, hybrid, on-site), and business models being turned upside down. Boards, stakeholders, and organizational members are leaning on their leaders to achieve success quickly in uncharted territory—tackling these challenges in a pressurized environment of unknowns, uncertainties, disruptions, and turbulence.

Recent research provides ample evidence many leaders and managers are aware of their own unpreparedness and the increasing unacceptable failure rate. Even before the pandemic, McKinsey reported, “74 percent of US [senior] leaders and 83 percent of global ones think they are unprepared” for their [senior level] roles.”<sup>3</sup> In the aftermath of the pandemic, DDI reports that only 28% of HR professionals believe their organizations have high-quality leadership. Only 11% say they have a strong succession plan to fill leadership roles.<sup>4</sup>

Are you aware of your unpreparedness? While many leaders are aware they lack the preparedness for senior-level positions (as McKinsey states), you may be like many leaders I know who think they’re ready but are unaware of their lack of knowledge, blind spots, and leadership gaps.

Their unpreparedness, regrettably, is despite the barrage of advice at every leader's fingertips and their participation in numerous development programs, MBA and EMBA courses, and proven leadership experiences.

Consequently, if you are like these leaders, you, too, are grasping for answers. You thirst for substantive advice, insights, strategies, and practical actions to enhance your knowledge, skillsets, and performance in your current position, as well as the necessary growth and preparedness to succeed when selected for a senior-level position.

*Embracing Senior Leadership provides the solutions you are looking for.*

Don't wait! You don't want to miss out on enhancing the skills and abilities necessary to climb your organization's ladder and succeed at the senior level. By taking an active (not passive) role in embracing the insights, learning from the anecdotes, and engaging the practical actions offered in this book by more than 200 extraordinarily successful executives and senior leaders, your growth will be substantial. When tapped for a senior-level position, you will be ready.

Unlike other books, articles, blogs, and podcasts that focus on a few essential leadership behaviors (like "be decisive"), theories or principles (transformational leadership), or focused on a specific organizational function (chief marketing officer), this book digs into what you truly need to know to be successful.

In essence, leading at the senior level is fundamentally different from leading at lower organizational levels. You are constantly shifting your attention between the organization's external and internal environments and between meeting current organizational requirements and ensuring the organization's future viability and competitive edge.

To be successful at the senior level requires mastery of three crucial factors:

1. *The Job.* Having in-depth knowledge and skillsets to meet the extraordinary challenges faced at the senior level and perform the required unique work.
2. *The Ability.* Having the personal readiness to perform the unique work required at the senior level.
3. *A Plan.* Having a well-thought-out transition plan once selected for a senior-level position.

Without a comprehensive, in-depth understanding of the body of knowledge needed to be successful (e.g., the mindset), the competencies, and expertise in each of these three vital factors, you may squander or undermine your opportunity to reach the senior level and succeed once there.

*Embracing Senior Leadership* provides the practical solutions that will enable you to master these three critical factors and perform the unique work with excellence. I garnered the insights, anecdotes, and practical actions from my extensive senior leadership experience, teaching and coaching senior leaders, and discussions and formal interviews with more than 200 successful CEOs and officers of Fortune 500 companies, secretaries of key government agencies, executive directors, university presidents, and admirals and generals.

Of these formidable 200 executives, more than 60 contributed directly to this book through formal in-depth interviews. Examples include Bob Stevens, CEO Lockheed Martin; Peter Schlote, Chief Operations Officer, Hensoldt Sensory GmbH (Germany); Bob McDonald, President and CEO of Procter & Gamble and later as Secretary of Veterans Affairs; General Colin Powell, former Secretary of State and Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff; Chet Huber, Senior Lecturer, Harvard Business School, and former CEO of OnStar; and Dr. Richard Danzig, Chairman of the Center for a New American Security and former Secretary of the Navy.

I've curated the wisdom offered and taken their real-world experiences and explanations regarding what for them were successful methods and behaviors. And just as important, what does not work. I've combined their insights, anecdotes, and practical actions into a practical manual for your personal growth and leadership success.

I am fortunate to be in the rare position to write this book. I've been in the leadership development business for three decades. Before serving as faculty, Chair of the Department of Strategic Leadership, and consultant at the prestigious Eisenhower School in Washington, DC, I led large-scale leader development programs, for example, serving as the Director of US Navy's worldwide leader development programs. I also served as the Chief of the Library of Congress Corporate University and CEO of a leadership training and consulting firm. I secured valuable knowledge, skillsets, and practical solutions from discussions with leadership scholars and visits to top EMBA and corporate university programs in the US and Canada.

In addition, I conducted more than 300 one-on-one executive coaching sessions and served as a keynote speaker and consultant.

*Embracing Senior Leadership* is not another book that simply frames the problem or offers superficial solutions. It serves, first and foremost, as your guide. While you may want to jump to a chapter that intrigues your interest, the book presents the three factors in an order I believe is most beneficial for your reflection, identifying insights, and growth.

As you go through this book, you will find a lot to digest. It is not my intent to overwhelm you with gratuitous information. Instead, I want to provide you with sufficient knowledge and insights that will motivate you to reflect and take action to enhance your ability to succeed at any leadership level, and especially as a senior leader.

The book's first part focuses on *Factor 1: The unique work and challenges of senior-level work*.

In the eight chapters making up this first part, you will discover, examine, and learn the key challenges and unique work required of senior leaders. You will gain an informed grasp of the fundamental differences between the unique work and skillsets required of operating at the more senior levels compared to those needed when leading at lower levels.

The flow of these eight chapters begins with Chapter 1 focusing on what makes leading at the senior level extraordinarily challenging, and the importance of being adept in the art and practice of strategic leadership. Chapter 2 outlines what it takes to lead strategically, gaining insight into vital leadership competencies such as foresight, anticipation, pattern recognition, development of big ideas, and an eight-step process of strategic and systems thinking.

Following strategic thinking outlined in Chapter 2, leaders must determine whether the vision and strategies remain valid or need to be reconceptualized to maintain the organization's purpose, legitimacy, and competitive advantage. Included in Chapter 3 are guidelines and action steps for formulating a compelling and inspiring vision, strategy, and the benefits of having a powerful organizational purpose.

Understanding the significant challenges and unique requirements at the senior level, Chapter 4 delves into the essential competencies needed to perform such roles and responsibilities. You explore and assess eight discrete abilities required for success and then examine and gain practical approaches in exercising four vital competencies necessary for leading

across organizations: (1) leveraging power and politics, (2) strategic negotiations, (3) strategic communications, and (4) building and nurturing strategic networks.

Following these first four chapters, focus shifts to the organization's internal environment. All the senior executives I've talked with concur there are four crucial internal organizational requirements you must lead and manage well:

- Building and leading your senior leadership team (Chapter 5).
- Shaping organizational culture (Chapter 5).
- Making senior-level decisions (Chapter 6).
- Leading and managing organizational change (Chapter 7).

Part I concludes with what to do to prepare for a crisis; practical actions that will assist in performing quickly under pressure during a crisis; and suggests actions following a crisis (Chapter 8).

The second part of the book (Chapters 9-11) focuses on *Factor 2: Personal readiness to perform senior-level work*.

You have five personal dimensions that encapsulate what you bring to the position. By understanding your uniqueness in these traits and abilities and purposefully nurturing your mind, body, and spirit, you will learn to channel these insights into creating wisdom and executive presence. The five are:

- *Cognitive capacity* (remembering, perceiving, thinking, and reasoning skills and abilities—Chapter 9).
- *Social capacity* (interpersonal and emotional intelligence skills—Chapter 10).
- *Personal traits, values, and preferences* (Chapter 10).
- *Technical skills and business acumen* (Chapter 10).
- *Behavioral capacity* (ability to change or adapt habitual behavior patterns—Chapter 10).

The remaining section of Part II (Chapter 11) focuses on two important elements essential to your ability to influence key leaders and stakeholders: exercising wisdom and projecting executive presence. The remaining portion of this chapter provides valuable insights and practical actions to

enhance your capacity in each of your five personal dimensions, as well as on three important factors that either sustain or detract from the effectiveness of your personal dimensions—mind, body, and spirit.

The final part of the book, Part III, focuses on *Factor 3: You’re Selected for a Senior Leadership Position—Now What?*

Once selected for a higher-level position, it is imperative to have a game plan with specific action steps to facilitate a smooth transition to your new position. The final two chapters, Chapters 12 and 13, are tactical approaches, insights, and specific actions to take as a newly selected senior leader prior to and within the first nine to twelve months of serving in a new senior-level leadership position.

By the way, that senior leader with the rough transition noted at the beginning was me. Boy, that was a brutal, eye-opening experience. One I sincerely hope you never have to go through. This experience is why I felt compelled to include the third factor to ensure your smooth transition to a senior-level position when selected.

Parts I and II are designed to give you the strong foundation necessary to perform the work successfully. Part III is designed to help you avoid potential pitfalls and to formulate a game plan for a smooth transition to the senior level and thrive once there.

*Embracing Senior Leadership* will sharpen your focus, help your learning and growth efforts, and, ultimately, enhance your readiness for success in both your current and future positions. The insights provided will help you develop a leadership framework that can guide your thoughts, behaviors, and decisions as you progress upwards through the organization.

While this book’s primary focus is on you as a leader, it serves as an excellent guide and resource for organizational efforts to develop strategic senior leaders. *Embracing Senior Leadership* is essential for executive recruiters, HR Directors, leadership and management training institutions, mentors, coaches, and universities (MBA, EMBA, and executive short courses).

For example, considering the high failure rate and the organizational costs of senior-level failures, CHROs must give greater attention to creating training and development programs and stretch opportunities for leaders throughout their organization, but especially for their high potentials. Formal mentorship programs should be planned and encouraged. This book

can serve as a foundation for such leader development programs and mentorship activities.

*Embracing Senior Leadership* is especially valuable for mid-level managers or leaders participating in leader development programs or applying for positions that would be considered stretch assignments.

### **Knowledge Without Action Is Not Enough!**

Throughout the book, “Pause and Reflect” sections assist you with reflection and understanding. These sections invite you to reflect on how the material you have just read applies to you or your current organization. Do you agree or disagree with the concepts discussed?

Do not wait until you finish reading this book to reflect or make notes—your immediate reflections and reactions will offer you the greatest opportunity to gain insights. Consider making notes, especially as analogies, insights, issues, or ideas for future use come to mind. Part II includes specific questions to stimulate thinking. Stop and answer these questions thoughtfully, preferably in writing. If your goal is to be a successful senior leader, you must learn and grow, and reflection is essential for that growth.

As General Chuck Krulak, former Commandant of the US Marine Corps, told me, “You must take the time to reflect. Reflection enables you to create an environment for personal growth.”<sup>5</sup> Bob McDonald, then CEO of Proctor and Gamble, agrees, saying, “It is important to read and constantly challenge yourself. When you read, you shouldn’t just read to read. You should read to reflect.”<sup>6</sup>

You may read through this book with the intent of gaining some insight but not commit to writing answers in response to the suggested prompts and questions. By responding only in your head, you create an intention to *do* something—but not an intention to *act* on it. Like a New Year’s resolution, you proclaim specific goals and actions but never follow through. Your intentions alone will not yield results.

Ann Hiatt, the former chief of staff to both Jeff Bezos, Amazon CEO, and Eric Schmidt, Google founder and CEO, emphasizes, “The greatest predictor of future success is one’s willingness to learn, experiment, fail, and repeat until one can produce the desired effect predictably. The challenge of learning new skills and mastering them is a reward in and of itself, but it also qualifies us for higher achievements the next time.”<sup>7</sup>

Will it be worth the time invested? *Absolutely*

Part I

# **The Unique Work and Challenges of Senior-Level Work**