



THE
LEADERSHIP
CRUCIBLE

Where Great Leaders Are Forged

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The Wisdom Born of Experience

I imagine all of you reading this have had situations in your life when you have said to yourself: “If I had only known then what I know now, I would have made a different decision.” We all have had those discussions with ourselves, and it’s natural to feel that way. It’s a reminder to all of us that no matter what our age, or our position in life, we are constantly learning and growing. Our experiences help shape us in ways we often don’t realize at the time. In his essay “Experience,” Ralph Waldo Emerson contends that one’s personal experiences, rather than external sources such as books or authorities, are the most valuable means of learning about oneself and the world. One of the core tenets of The Leadership Crucible is our premise that *Experience can be the best teacher, but only if it is shared with others.*

While it’s impossible for us to go back and change the past, it’s important to remember that every experience is an opportunity to take those lessons learned, so one does not make the same mistakes again.

By reflecting on our past decisions and experiences, and the outcomes from those decisions, we can gain acumen and insight to help us make better decisions in the future. As the saying goes, *wisdom comes from experience, and experience is often the result of the lack of it.* But gaining wisdom is not just about having experiences. It’s also about being intentional in having the courage to face up to the mistakes that one made, and to learn from them. That knowledge provides insight and perspectives that you did not have before and becomes the foundation for making better decisions in the future. Wisdom will only come from experience if one uses that experience as a learning and growth opportunity.



*“No one ever became
wise by chance.”*
Seneca

As the philosopher Seneca put it, “No one ever became wise by chance.” It is a personal choice. I have witnessed many people experience the same result repeatedly, expecting a different outcome because they never learned from past experiences or owned the mistakes that led to their failure.

Think of the people that you turn to seek their wise counsel. They likely gained that wisdom through a combination of experience, education, facing difficult life experiences, tough professional decisions, painful relationships, and overcoming their own fears. Although they traveled different paths and had different experiences, they shared common traits that helped them to become wise.

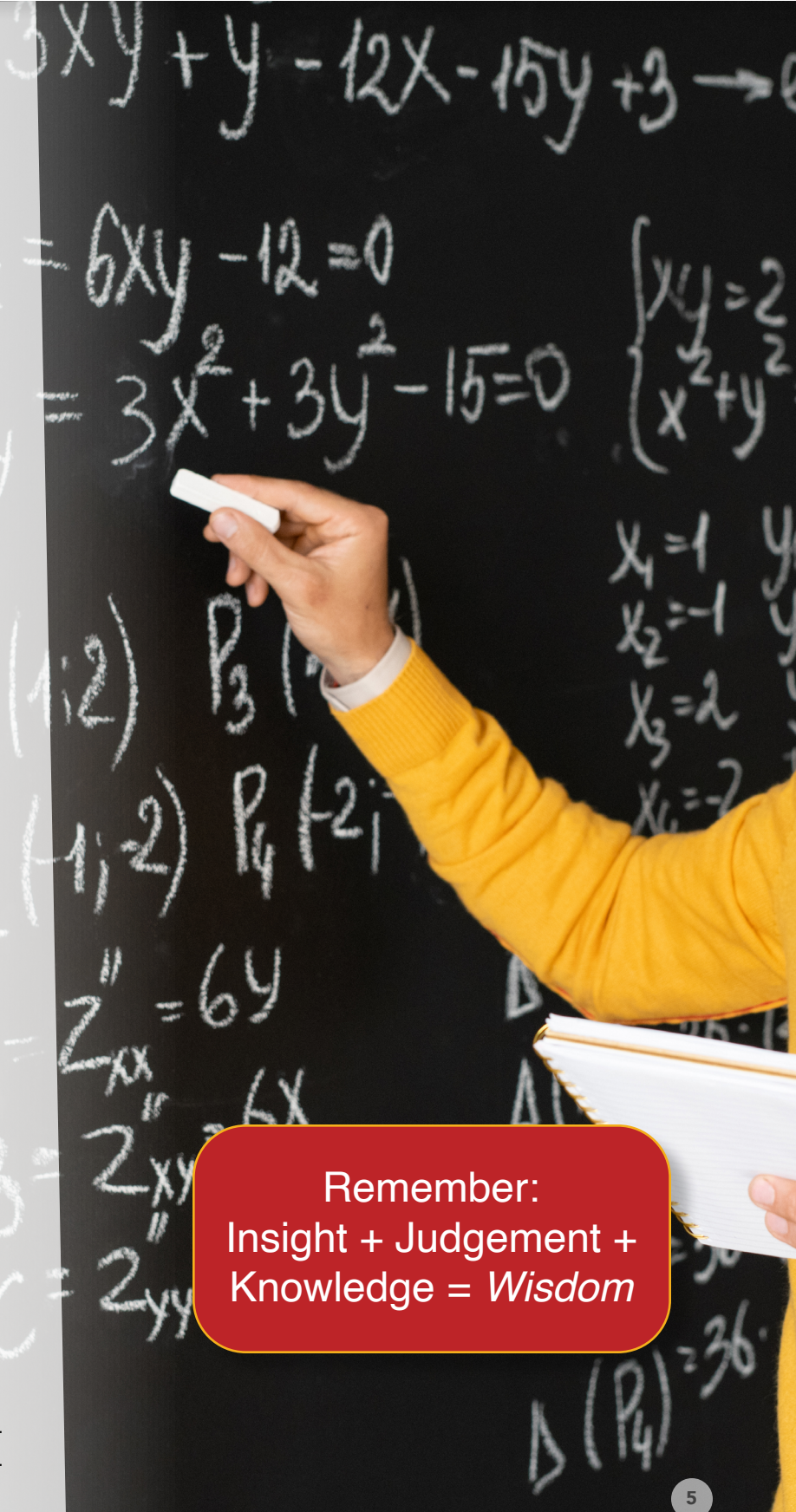
- They learned lessons from each experience to develop a greater knowledge base. It has taught them not to overreact and put aside short-term gains or losses, but to make decisions that serve a longer and broadening horizon.
- They can embrace uncertainty and the ambiguity one often faces to make good judgments. They are comfortable taking action without much clarity. This is almost an art form that comes from experience, judgment, and making many mistakes.
- They possess humility and are comfortable knowing what they don't know. As a result, they are open to different opinions. They seek out diverse thoughts and are comfortable asking questions and listening to gain a greater understanding and knowledge base.
- They push themselves outside of their comfort zone, as they know that there is no growth when you live in it. As Eleanor Roosevelt said, “We gain strength, and courage, and confidence by each experience in which we really stop to look fear in the face . . . we must do that which we think we cannot.”

- They have the ability to reflect on their own experiences to help them better understand themselves and others. This trait also helps them identify their strengths and weaknesses, which helps them to make better decisions and solve complex problems.
- They are receptive to ideas and perspectives, which helps to reduce their prejudices and biases.
- They are altruistic and have a true interest in helping others without expecting anything in return.

These traits are foundational in developing and cultivating one's own wisdom, and when one focuses on developing them, they can have a significant impact on the path your life will take. So often, when we are younger, we are so focused on acquiring knowledge, but what is lost is the perspective on how to apply it most effectively. You have heard the saying, "Knowledge is knowing what to say. Wisdom is knowing when to say it." When you can couple your expertise and develop the aforementioned traits, you will find that your decision processes will greatly improve, and you pave the way forward for greater fulfillment at work and in life because you have insight and make better judgments.

Remember: Insight + Judgement + Knowledge = *Wisdom*

While we often speak of personal wisdom, we don't often think about organizations having wisdom. However, having worked in a number of them, one can quickly determine how the values, the ethical rationale used in making decisions, and established organizational behaviors drive the culture.



Remember:
Insight + Judgement +
Knowledge = *Wisdom*



Cultivating organizational wisdom has never been more important than it is today for three distinct reasons. First, the speed at which change will occur in the acceleration of technology and its adaptation, working environments, and societal shifts. The second is the demographic shifts that are occurring, which will result in a growing population, a population that will get older, not to mention a significant shift in racial proportions. Third, generational shifts will occur in the near future, forcing workplace culture changes, workers wanting increased flexibility, wellness perks, authenticity and value alignment from their employers.

Fostering organizational wisdom is a continuous process that requires a combination of knowledge, experience, critical thinking, continuous reflection, and a commitment to investment to developing the skill sets needed to make organizationally wise decisions. Those include:

- Wise, value-guided decisions and actions
- Developing as high level of expertise in your profession
- Have a clear understanding and knowledge of the world that surrounds your organization, and how it may impact it.
- The ability to think critically, organizationally.
- Doing the right thing when the consequences of failure are high.
- Communicate lessons learned freely throughout the organization; lessons can't be learned unless they are shared.
- Creating an organizational culture that is built on insight, judgment, and knowledge has the ability to adapt quickly.
- The organizational ability to review and learn from success and failure to enhance performance.
- The ability to pass on wisdom and knowledge to others inspires and motivates them to create a culture of wisdom in the organization.


Cultivating wisdom in the workplace is not only beneficial for individuals and teams but also for the organization as a whole. A wise organization can foster a competitive advantage, a positive reputation, a loyal customer base, and a sustainable future. Therefore, cultivating wisdom in the workplace is a worthwhile endeavor for any organization.

A simple process used by individuals and organizations and is commonly used in the emergency services and military is the use of post-incident debriefings. These debriefs are often held on incidents of significance and are the intentional action of a structured process of reviewing and analyzing an event or situation. The aim is to identify what went well, what didn't go well, and what can be improved in the future. Following a debrief, it is beneficial to produce an after-action report (AAR) to share with the entire agency. An after-action report highlights:

- What happened in the incident
- What the agency's response was
- What went well in the response
- What needs to be improved

An individual or any organization can take this concept to develop their own process to develop lessons learned from an experience or an event, creating learning opportunities and perspectives, and if done consistently, is an excellent way to create wisdom for yourself and your organization. So, after an event or process that did not go well, ask the following.

- What were we trying to accomplish?
- What went wrong?
- When did it go wrong?
- Why did it go wrong?
- What needs to be changed so we are successful in the future?



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If used consistently, this process is a great way to learn from your mistakes. For the individual, it often shines light on areas where one may be deficient or have a blind spot, creating an opportunity to address and improve upon those areas. Organizationally, this process will highlight why the objectives were not met and will point out areas that need to be improved so it will not happen again.

If this process becomes routine for an individual or an organization, you create a continuous feedback loop of learning opportunities and improvement and that ultimately will lead to developing wisdom.



Readers Are Leaders

I believe that to be a good leader, one must be on a continuous quest to gain more knowledge. The leadership benefits of reading are wide-ranging. Evidence suggests reading can improve intelligence and lead to innovation and insight. To that end, we provide a few suggested titles below for you to consider:

The Mountain is You: Transforming: Transforming Self-Sabotage into Self-Mastery
Brianna Wiest

The Art of War
Sun Tzu

Wisdom Life's Great Treasure
Richard E. Simmons III

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People
Stephen R. Covey

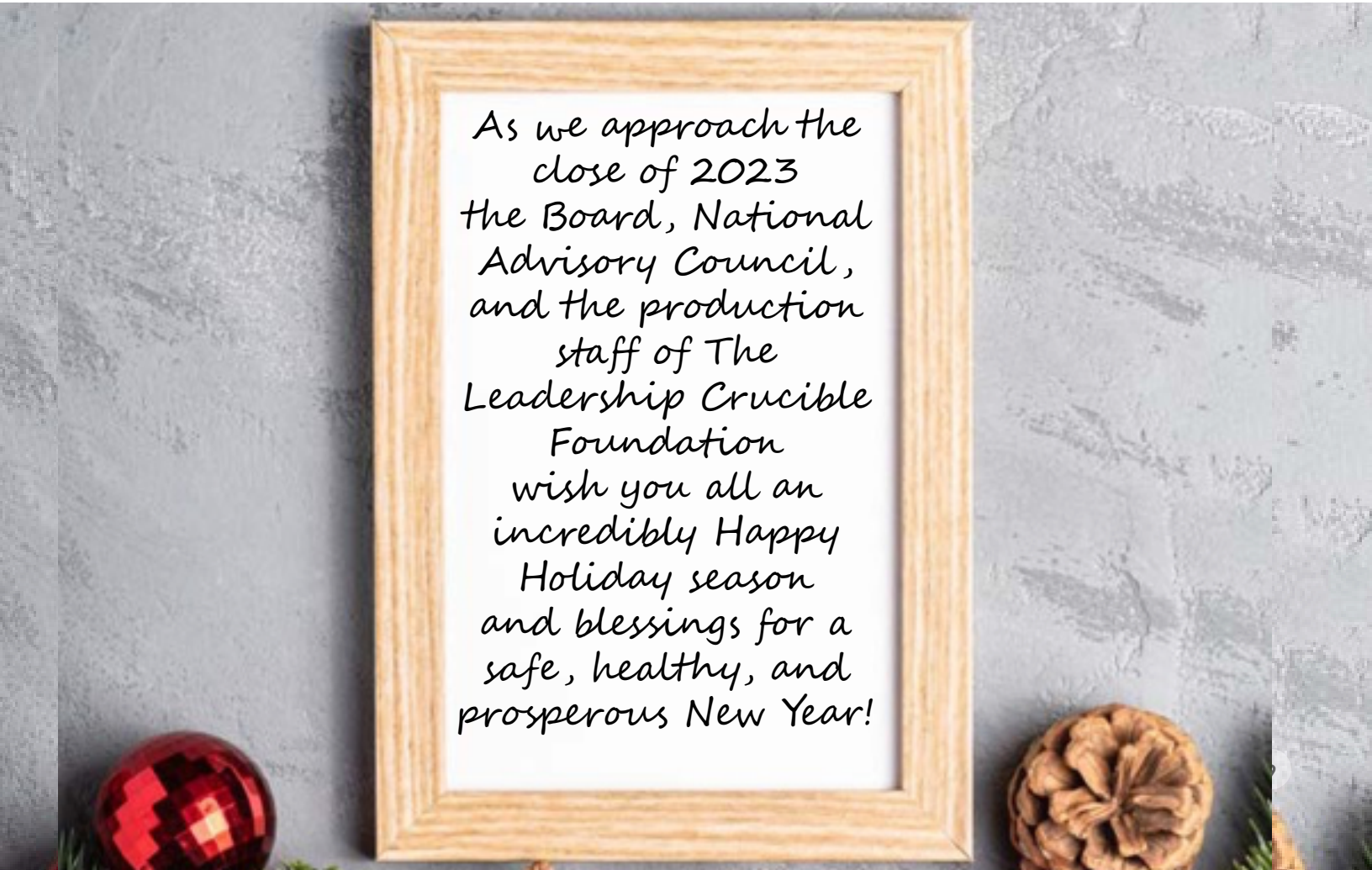
The Wisdom of Crowds
James Surowiecki



Chief B's Key Leadership Takeaways

Having the honor of speaking to great leaders in their profession in The Leadership Crucible Podcast, we make notes on the key leadership takeaways that we discussed. We share these personal and leadership takeaways- these insights- with you in hopes they will help you reflect on them personally or from a professional perspective. These may also provide potential talking points that you can discuss with your team or colleagues, which often create great dialogue insights.

- 🔥 Experience can be the best teacher, but only if it is shared with others.
- 🔥 Wisdom comes from experience, and experience is often the result of the lack of it
- 🔥 Insight + Judgement + Knowledge = *Wisdom*.
- 🔥 Take responsibility for your mistakes, reframe your mistakes into lessons and use them as opportunities to grow.
- 🔥 Put lessons learned from a mistake or a failure into practice.
- 🔥 Observational learning from others can be a valuable tool in developing strength of perspectives.
- 🔥 No one ever becomes wise by chance; it is your choice!



As we approach the
close of 2023
the Board, National
Advisory Council,
and the production
staff of The
Leadership Crucible
Foundation
wish you all an
incredibly Happy
Holiday season
and blessings for a
safe, healthy, and
prosperous New Year!