



**THE**  
**LEADERSHIP**  
**CRUCIBLE**

**Where Great Leaders Are Forged**

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## All You Need is One Person to Care


This past month I lost a dear friend and mentor who profoundly changed the trajectory of my life and the lives of many others. As I was reflecting on our relationship, as I heard the stories that were told about him at his service, it was evident he had influenced thousands. There was a common thread that ran through all of the testimonials that day. He had a unique talent to help others go where they would not have gone themselves by providing instruction, professional insights, opportunities for engagement, and, above all- support.

In the many podcasts that I have done, there is often the story of how one person had a significant influence on the person's life, and like my own, it changed the very direction and professional status that they were able to obtain. I would like to share one of those with you from a man named Robert Peterson, who I recently interviewed, whose story embodies the impact that one person, in his case, two people, can have on changing the direction of a person's life.

### **An excerpt from my interview with Robert Peterson**

"In 1982, my parents were moving from Missouri to California to try and start a new life. Halfway between Missouri and California, my parents decided to separate. At that time, I was 14 years old, and I needed a father at that time so I went with my dad to California in a truck with a box of tools in the back, where he found a warehouse in which we could get into. We went in there to build an office inside that warehouse and put a bed up on top of the office. He and I slept together. We had a toilet, a sink, and running water, and that is where he started to change his life, from a warehouse in Placentia."





“A couple of investigators from the County Sheriff’s Department came in to buy some tools from him and each time they would come in I would listen to their conversations, as I was sitting in the back of the warehouse fixing tools so that we could sell them. The investigators Bill Denton and Harry Sherlock were their names, I say their names because I will always remember them for what they did for me.

They noticed that I wasn’t in school at the times they would come in, and they asked me what I was doing, and I told them I was helping my dad. I was not going to school, and at the time, my dad had a ninth grade education. He said I didn’t have to go back to school. I mean when you’re 14 years old and your parent tells you don’t have to go back to high school it sounds like a really good proposition. They went: ‘Whoa, tell you what, if you go back to high school and you graduate, we’ll help you get a job with Orange County Sheriff’s Department.’ I thought that sounded like a fairly good deal because I had no direction, and I wasn’t sure what I was going to do.

The investigators lived up to their word and started mentoring me every time they’d come in. Three years later I graduated. Nobody in my family had ever graduated from high school. So when I graduated they reached out to me and said: ‘Okay, this is what we’d like you to do: you’re 19 years old you’re not old enough to be a deputy’, so they said ‘we need you to come apply for a job as a correctional service technician. You’re going to get interviewed so you need a suit; do you have one?’ I said: ‘no.’ They said: ‘Go to the local five and dime and get one.’ So I went, got this big suit which made me look like a clown. I remember standing in front of Sheriff’s headquarters building with them, didn’t know how to tie a tie.”

“I still remember Bill grabbing my tie and showing me how to put it on and how to tie it. He said, ‘Just go in there and be yourself.’ I did and after the interview I got a job washing inmates clothing in the basement of the central men’s jail in Santa Ana California. I ran a crew of five inmates and those were really the only people that I spoke to on a daily basis. Communicating with the inmates and hearing their stories was interesting and familiar. My family came from rough upbringings, at one point I watched my brother in that jail, and I understood where most of these inmates came from, because it’s where I came from too.”

If it were not for Bill and Harry, Robert may have ended up there as well. Here is the rest of Robert’s journey. Robert went on to pursue becoming a Deputy Sheriff, graduating from the Academy in 1989. He continued to be promoted through the ranks to sergeant in 2002, lieutenant in 2009, captain in 2012, commander in 2016. During his tenure he worked in a variety of positions including SWAT, Special and Directed Enforcement Team, Academy Drill Sergeant, Self Defense Instructor, and Commander of the Special Enforcement Bureau which includes SWAT, Bomb Squad, Air Support Unit, and Hostage Negotiation Team.

As a Bureau Commander of the Central Jails Division, he oversaw running the very jail that he began as civilian washing inmates clothing. In 2019, he was promoted to Undersheriff where he was responsible for overseeing the daily operations of the Orange County Sheriff’s Department, the 6th largest sheriff’s Department in the United States. Bob retired from the Sheriff’s Department on January 5, 2021.



*“So many of us, are either just one person away from being a success story, or one decision away from a totally different life.”*



Robert, like so many of us, are either just one person away from being a success story or one decision away from a totally different life. What if Robert had chosen not to go back to school?

The path of a person's life can be altered by numerous factors such as the situation they grew up in, their personal choices, and the external influences of their environment. But the reality is one person can change the direction of another person's life by just caring enough to engage with them, providing the opportunity to learn, by offering guidance, feedback, and support. If you are in leadership position today, one of the most rewarding actions you can undertake is to support and mentor the people that you work with. In our day-to-day lives, there are moments when we get to decide whether we want to offer a helping hand to someone with whom we work, or with whom we have a personal relationship. While these gestures often feel trivial to us, and cost nothing but a little bit of your time and the sharing of your experience, the payoff from helping someone change their flight path in life is immeasurable. Small actions can have a big impact on someone's life, being kind, compassionate and supportive can help change the trajectory of another person's life for the better. Here are some tips that might be helpful to do just that:

1. *Make it a personal commitment.* If you want to be that "one person" in the life of another to help change their life trajectory, you have to make part of your own personal mission. If you don't embrace those opportunities, it will never happen.

2. *Lead by example.* This is a powerful way to inspire others when someone sees another person living their life with integrity compassion and purpose. It can help motivate them to do the same thing. Being a positive role model and leading by example shows others that success is possible and inspires them to make the changes necessary to reach new heights for themselves.

3. *Invest your time.* Spending a little bit of time with the person that you're trying to help shows that you're committed to helping them and when you're committed, that is often what will energize them, inspiring them to engage in their own growth and development.

4. *Understand their perspective.* Understanding the person's current situation and what their long term goals are by taking time to listen to them without any judgment, and trying to see things from their point of view, helps you to understand the best way that you can help them.

5. *Engage them.* Sometimes all it takes is one opportunity to change the course of someone's life by providing someone with an opportunity to experience something new. Assign them to a project with senior level staff, sending them to a meeting with outside professionals, or provide them with an opportunity to attend an outside training typically reserved for higher level positions. Planting the seed of what could lie in their future is often a great motivator.

6. *Help them to set goals.* Help the person to identify their long-term goals, and breaking them down into smaller achievable steps can help them stay motivated and focused on what they want to achieve.

7. *Provide both positive and constructive feedback.* Encouragement and positive feedback can go a long way in boosting someone's confidence and self-esteem. A compliment or a word of appreciation can motivate someone to work harder and help them to achieve their objectives. Providing constructive feedback is also particularly important, as it provides learning opportunities for the person involved.



*“One of the most rewarding actions you can undertake is to support and mentor the people that you work with.”*



*“Make that “one decision” that can change the lives of others, or can change your own life.”*

8. *Providing emotional support.* Life can be difficult at times and having someone that person could talk to to seek advice, and vent their frustrations is especially important for someone when they are experiencing difficulties or feeling overwhelmed. Being a good listener-someone who is attentive and empathetic can go a long way to keep them on their path.

9. *Help them to develop resilience.* We know from our own journey how important resilience and the ability to bounce back from setbacks and challenges is to one's ultimate success. Encouraging and helping the individual to develop resilience by focusing on their strengths and learning from their mistakes while staying committed and hopeful is extremely important.

10. *Celebrate their success.* Celebrating their successes is a powerful motivator for individuals, and it reinforces the meaning behind all of the hard work they have done to achieve their objectives. Take the time to recognize their achievements and celebrate with them.

I think back on my own journey and there were a number of people that have helped me to achieve the level of success I have had. If it were not for them I know I would not be in the positions that I am in today. Their commitment to provide guidance, mentoring and constructive feedback along the way contributed to my GPS to success. But there was another important element in all of this, and that was my willingness to put in the time and effort, accept the feedback and walk through the doors that they had opened for me.

No matter what level you find yourself in your organization today, there is an opportunity to be that “one person,” or to make that “one decision” that can change the lives of others, or can change your own life. If you want a life well lived, don't be afraid to do either.



## 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:

### **Leaders Eat Last: Why Some Teams Pull Together and Other Don't**

Simon Sinek

### **Trust and Inspire: How Truly Great Leaders Unleash Greatness in Others**

Stephen M.R. Covey

### **Give and Take, Why Helping Others Drives Our Success**

Adam Grant






### **Helping People Change: Coaching with Compassion for Lifelong Learning and Growth**

Richard Boyatzis



## Chief B's Key Leadership Takeaways

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

-  You can be a force multiplier in the lives of others.
-  You're always one decision away from a totally different life, don't be afraid to make it.
-  The only thing many people need to be successful is for one person to care enough to engage and help them. Be that person!
-  The most rewarding actions you can take is to support and mentor the people with whom you work.
-  Your legacy will not be measured by the title you held; it will be measured by the people you helped to a better life.