

PAYING IT FORWARD

Leading With Purpose

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After 40 years in the fire service, Chief Randy Bruegman founded The Leadership Crucible Foundation to reshape future leadership with a focus on fostering courage, empathy, and humility in leadership positions.

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Are You Walking Your Talk?

As we begin this new year, it is important to take time to reflect on 2023 and the challenges that are being faced today. In the U.S., like many other countries, significant issues have emerged that must be dealt with if we are to be a safe and prosperous nation.

I was reading through a PEW research report conducted in June of 2023 that found that the majority of Americans say 8 of the 16 issues included on the survey are “very big problems” facing the country.

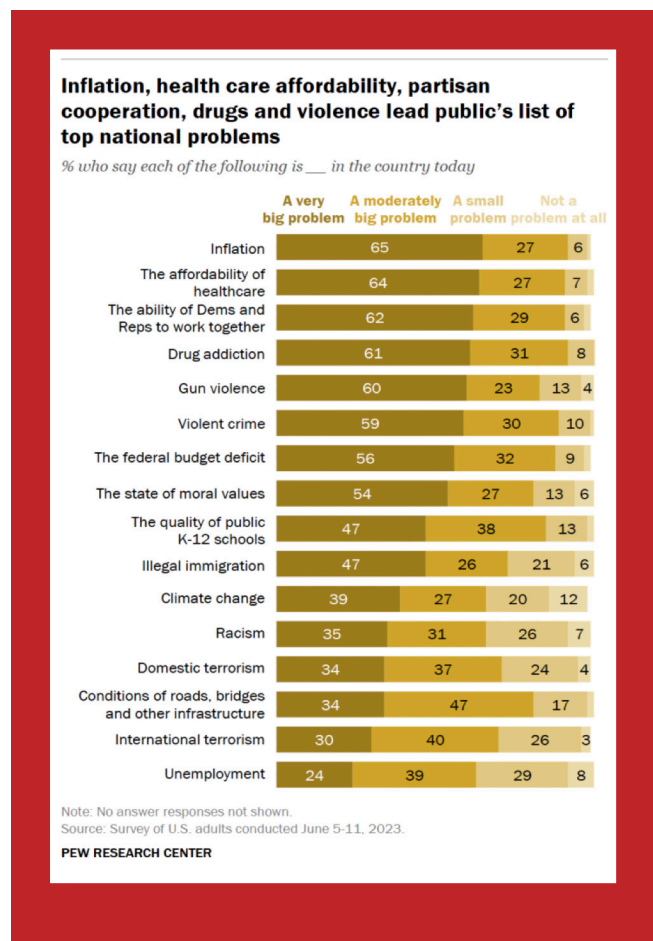
Where Great Leaders Are Forged

These range from economic concerns, such as inflation, affordability of health care, and the budget deficit, to drug addiction, gun violence, and violent crime. As I was thinking about this newsletter’s construct, I watched a national news feed, and most of the stories revolved around these 16 issues. Most of the comments by those in leadership positions that had the responsibility for and could impact these issues were inconsequential. In fact, they often never addressed the issue; they talked about it, blamed others for the causation, and had no real plan on how to address the issue to which they were speaking.

A classic example of leaders talking their talk, but never truly addressing the principal causes of the problem in the first place. The need for leaders to “walk their talk” is a crucial aspect of leadership, and it takes courage to do so. When leaders fail to act courageously, they risk allowing the perpetuation of an issue even when the principal causes are known.

Look at those 16 issues identified in the PEW report; a considerable number of actionable steps could be taken for each that would be impactful and begin to address these issues. So why is that not happening? So often, this is because leaders are trying to thread the political needle or not make anyone angry that nothing tangible occurs. This happens in government and most organizations on a daily basis. While the issues facing are complex and multifaceted, and there are no easy solutions, by embracing a new form of leadership and cultivating the skills and mindsets needed to

handle these challenges, leaders can help create a more sustainable future. But you can’t do that just by talking the talk; you have to walk the talk, and that takes guts and perseverance.



The Importance of Walking the Talk

No matter the type of organization you work in or what level you find yourself in, you have probably had many experiences working with or for people who say one thing and do another. The boss, known for his strong work ethic and commitment to his employees, often speaks of the importance of hard work and dedication and has set high work expectations for his employees. But his actions don’t match his words. He frequently leaves work early and takes lengthy vacations, leaving his employees to pick up his responsibilities while he is away. Over time, his employees began to lose faith in his leadership and no longer saw him as a role model but rather as a hypocrite.

Your co-worker is known for her strong leadership skills and her ability to motivate her team. She often speaks of the importance of teamwork and collaboration and expects her team members to work together

to achieve their goals. However, her actions do not always match her words. She frequently takes credit for her team’s work and fails to acknowledge their contributions. Over time, her team members lose faith in her leadership.

It is not enough to simply talk the talk; leaders must also walk the walk. When leaders set high standards for themselves and their followers, they must be willing to hold themselves accountable to those standards. This means leading by example, even when it is difficult or inconvenient. If leaders fail to live up to their own standards, they risk losing the respect and trust of their followers. This can lead to a lack of motivation, decreased productivity, and even high turnover among your employees. Conversely, leaders who lead by example inspire their followers to do the same.

Leaders can create a culture of excellence and achievement by setting high standards for themselves and the people they have been empowered to lead.

What are the top issues your organization faces today, and are they being handled effectively? If not, is that due to those in leadership positions not walking their talk? Does your organization have value statements posted throughout their facilities, but few in the organization actually abide by them? And what about you? Are you Walking Your Talk?

Taking the time to reflect on your habits and behaviors is important for your personal growth and is a good reality check to see if you are on the right track.

Here are a few questions to ask yourself that will provide insight into whether you are or are not.

- Can other people trust you to keep your word? Trust is an important part of any relationship. If you want others to trust you, being reliable and following through on your commitments is important. If you're not able to keep your word, be honest with others and work to make things right.

- Do you have a habit of saying one thing but acting differently? It's important to be honest with yourself and others. If you find that you're not following through on your words, take some time to reflect on why that might be. Are you overcommitting yourself? Are you not being true to your values? Once you identify the root cause, you can work on making changes to align your actions with your words.

- Are you giving advice that you don't use yourself? It's important to practice what you preach. If you're giving advice to others, make sure that you're following that advice yourself. This will help you build credibility and trust with others.

- Do you make excuses, or do you do something about it? It's easy to make excuses when things don't go as planned. However, making excuses won't help you achieve your goals. Instead, focus on taking action and finding solutions to the challenges you face.

- Do you always mean 'Yes' when you say it? It's important to be honest with yourself and others. If you're not sure if you can commit to something, it's okay to say no. This will help you avoid overcommitting yourself and ensure you can follow through on your promises.

- Are you in practice making promises to yourself... and do you keep them? Making promises to yourself is a great way to hold yourself accountable and work towards your goals. However, it's important to make sure your promises are realistic and achievable. If you find that you're not keeping the promises you make to yourself, try breaking them down into smaller, more manageable steps. This can help you build momentum and stay motivated.

- Do you claim to hate gossip, but you participate in it anyway? Gossip can be harmful and hurtful. If you find yourself engaging in gossip, take a step back and reflect on why you're doing it. Are you trying to fit in with a group? Are you feeling insecure? Once you identify the root cause, you can work on making changes to avoid gossiping in the future.



However you answered these questions, some basic strategies you can put into practice will help you keep on track to walk your talk.

- Be clear about your values. Identify what is important to you and what you stand for. This will help you stay focused on your goals and make decisions that align with your values.

- Model behavior you want to see in others. If you want others to follow certain rules or behaviors, demonstrate them first.

- Act as if you are part of the team. Don't just delegate tasks to others; get involved and work alongside them.

- Collaborate on achieving goals, work with others to achieve common goals, and make sure everyone has a stake in the outcome.

- Do what you say you're going to do. Follow through on your promises and commitments.

- Invest your time: Be present at events, roll up your sleeves, and help out. Be the leader that attends and participates as it gives everyone an opportunity to learn and grow together and create valuable relationships.

- Follow the Rules. A position of power can cause some individuals to feel that the rules do not apply to them now that they are in charge. Not only is this false, but it is also a practice that can quickly breed toxicity in an organization.

- Choose Your Words Wisely. You never know who is listening or how others may perceive casual remarks.

It's not always easy to walk your talk. It requires a great deal of self-awareness, discipline, and commitment to align your actions with your words. However, it's an essential part of personal growth and effective leadership. By walking the talk, you can build trust, credibility, and respect among others and inspire them to follow your example. That's a great gift to be able to give to others!



Leaders Are Readers

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 that reading can improve intelligence and lead to innovation and insight. To that end, we provide a few suggested titles below for you to consider:

Walk The Walk

Aslan Deutschman

Choosing Courage: The Everyday Guide to Being Brave at Work

Jim Detert

Walking the Talk, Building A Culture Fore Success

Carolyn Walker

Walk The Talk and Get The Results You Want

Eric Harvey and Al Lucia



Chief B's Key Leadership Takeaways



Having the honor of speaking to great leaders in their profession in **The Leadership Crucible Podcast**, we take notes on the key leadership takeaways 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. Points you can discuss with your team or colleagues, often creating great dialogue insights:

- Talk the talk means putting words into action, showing you mean what you say by doing it. It's a version of "practice what you preach."
- You make a difference by the example you set, not by the words you speak.
- I don't hear what you say when I see what you do, and they don't match!
- Whether in the workplace, relationships, family, or parenting, the best way to help guide others is through your behaviors inspiring them to do the same.
- Leaders lead by example, whether they intend to or not.

Whether you're in a senior leadership position, a mentor, a sounding board, or a boss, you hold an influential position. People in the organization look up to you for direction and inspiration and hope to emulate your behaviors.

When you set a good example by walking your talk and practicing what you preach, you instill the values and behaviors in the people that you work with, and when you can do that, that is the best reward a person can receive.