

# Unleashing the Leader in You

Unleash the leader in you and show up in the world with ALL of your talents and gifts. Apply ideas from this collection of articles originally published in the [RiversQuest Revelations](#) eletter.



**By Jeannine Wirth**





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## How to Use this Book

“We are all leaders, and we are all leading all the time, often in small, unintended ways.”

Chris Lowney in “Heroic Leadership”

This book is a collection of action provoking articles about every day leadership. As Chris Lowney said, we often lead in small unintended ways. The articles in this book will put intention behind our every day actions and leadership. Even when you do not have a leadership title you lead in your own strength and area of responsibility. You lead your children to define themselves, make their own decisions and stretch themselves. You lead yourself to a clean house, an organized desk, an optimistic day. You lead your work team to fulfill the goals and mission of your team and organization. Every choice you make reflects your leadership style and your values to those around you.

Each short article will challenge you to think differently about yourself and how you choose to show up in the world. It is not necessary to read the articles in the printed order. Choose the article that speaks to you today and decide how it fits your life and circumstances. Click on the title in the table of contents to jump directly to the article you have chosen. Challenge the voices in your head and make a choice to step intentionally into your leadership role.

“We cannot change the way the world is, but by opening ourselves to the world as it is, we may find that gentleness, decency, and bravery are available—not only to us, but to all human beings.”

Chögyam Trungpa Buddhist teacher

I hope you are provoked to taking action as you read the articles assembled in this eBook as my gift to you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennie White". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

## Dare to Dream in Color

Do you feel like a kernel of popcorn waiting to be popped?

Do you feel like a butterfly trapped in a caterpillar's body?



I recently completed working with a client that felt like a chick trapped in her shell. She was doing work that she had once enjoyed and did with enthusiasm and energy every day. But as the economy changed so did her situation. She no longer felt valued or engaged in her job or the company she worked for. One particularly bad day she picked up the phone and called me. She wanted a partner in her search for the enthusiasm and excitement she had lost in the third of her life she spent making money to support herself and her family.

Together we quickly settled on a roadmap to the pot of gold that for her was a job she would love to go to everyday and feel like she was providing value for the company doing something she is naturally good at doing.

“Joan” had qualms about making a career change as most people do that talk to me about their careers.

“Nobody is hiring”

“I will never find a job in this area and will have to move”

“Nobody will pay me the salary I make here given the economic times”

All these are familiar phrases and I am sure you can add more from the voices in your own head. Rather than accept those phrases as true, we decided to focus on identifying her natural strengths and uncover what she would love to be doing.

As we worked together, each month the hole in Joan's shell got a little larger letting in light and air. First the light exposed talents and passion that had been hidden and buried due to lack of use. Next we described in vivid color what her dream job would look like; her daily tasks, her travel schedule, her peers, her clients and the outcomes of her contribution to the company. This multi-dimensional, colorful image resulted in a list of companies for her to pursue.

The shell cracked open and the sight of freedom re-ignited her passion for work. We developed a resume that described the value she could personally bring to the companies she had identified as dream employers. Her passion and value shone through the words on the page and in her voice as she prepared to contact each company.



Joan has escaped from the last remnants of the shell that was hiding her talents and value from the world. She is free from the imposed bonds and excited again to go to work each day and provide value through her unique strengths and talents. She is working with an employer she pursued to do a job she custom made for herself.

“You can feed attention to your obstacles or you can feed attention to your desires. One gives you magnified obstacles. The other brings you fire.” Tama Kieves in *This Time I Dance!*

What would happen if you dared to feed attention to your desires, to dream in vivid color of the life you want to lead? I challenge you to put the same amount of energy behind finding a way to do work you love that you spend listing the obstacles to that dream.

This does not mean you have to leave your current position. Talk to others around you. You may find one of them that would love to do the tasks that you hate. You may find that the work you dream of doing is not being done because no one thought about it. Step into your own power and take charge of finding the work of your dream.

## Ten Practices for Active Listening

Do you really listen and fully engage in conversations?

If you are not sure or others tell you that you are not - here are ten practices that will enhance your listening skills and bring conversations to a deeper level and build trust. Try them out and see if you or others notice a difference.

**1. Stop talking: to others and to yourself**

- a. Turn down the voices in your head and really listen to the speaker
- b. Suspend the need to prepare a response or tell your own story

**2. Suspend judgment about the message and/or the speaker**

- a. Listen to the emotion and message without judgment

**3. Resist distractions – silence email and phone, close your door**

- a. Turn off your computer monitor or turn away from your computer when others come to your office for a conversation
- b. Close the door if necessary to eliminate distractions and interruptions



**4. Listen to the whole comment, then pause 2 seconds before responding**

- a. Practice pausing two seconds before uttering a word of response
- b. Let the whole message from the speaker resonant before formulating a response

**5. Speak only affirmatively while listening**

- a. Let the speaker know you are listening with body language and affirming short words, not interruption, just affirmation

**6. Watch for non-verbal cues such as anger, excitement, boredom, etc.**

- a. Watch and listen for the emotion behind the words that will deepen your understanding of the message

**7. When in doubt check it out**

- a. Do not hesitate to ask the speaker to repeat or clarify
- b. Asking questions shows that you are listening and care about the message of the speaker
- c. Clarifying questions will ensure true understanding by all parties





**8. Show continued interest in the speaker or terminate the conversation**

- a. Non-interest will be relayed by your body language and verbal cues
- b. If you cannot stay present with the conversation ask that it be continued at a time when you can really listen

**9. Really look at the speaker. Maintain solid eye contact to show you are truly listening**

- a. Eye contact shows interest and presence
- b. Be careful not to stare, a little goes a long way

**10. Stop talking, including the voices in your head**

- a. Repeat practice 1
- b. This is the most important key to active listening

A leader does not have all the answers. A leader does have to listen to those around them – co-workers, supervisors, spouse, children, and even emails. Intentionally listening to what others offer will deepen your ability to interact with the world in a meaningful way. Which of these ten practices will you try out this week?

## Saving Time

I would like to tell you about the biggest time saver I have ever found.

If you are like me and always looking for ways to get more done in less time, I have a tip for you. For months I felt frantic every day with the long list of things that I felt needed to be done urgently. I would end the day mentally exhausted with a long list remaining on my desk. There were work tasks and ideas to be launched; the many tasks needed to keep the house organized and clean to some acceptable level; and charitable work that fulfills my passion for giving to others the gifts I have received through the work of those before me and around me.

One day as I was maintaining the hot tub that I never found time to use I asked myself, why don't I use this hot tub? Both my daughters are in college so I should have plenty of extra time. That day I made the decision to use the hot tub regularly rather than just clean and maintain it.

Guess what I discovered? By taking 20 minutes a day to do absolutely nothing I saved at least twice that much time. I honored my commitment to use the hot tub and soak for 15-20 minutes each day. I let my mind wander or go blank. I do not intentionally focus on anything while I am letting the warmth seep into my bones. Suddenly I find that inspiration to a dilemma comes to me when I am not consciously thinking about it. I am clearer about my priorities and tasks for the day and write more quickly and clearly. All of this has added up to working more efficiently and effectively.

Currently I am reading "Heroic Leadership" by Chris Lowney. He writes about the best practices of the Jesuits who have been a successful company for over 450 years. One of the disciplines they practice is taking five minutes three times per day to examine the opportunities and challenges of the day and how they reacted to them. This self examination provides ongoing feedback and allows them to incorporate lessons in real time and ensure they are acting in ways that move them toward their goals.

Do you need to have more time in your day? I suggest you find it by taking five minutes to do nothing. Sit comfortably in your chair or on the couch, in your bathtub of warm water or even your hot tub for ten minutes tomorrow. I wonder how much time you will save or what inspiration will come to you?







## Mindset Matters

Henry Ford is attributed as saying, "Whether you think you can, or think you can't, you're right."

We each create our own reality based on the words we tell ourselves to describe and define the events and decisions of our lives. Consider this scale of mindset:

**0** = I hate my circumstances and am angry. No good will come of this.

**5** = I recognize that challenges are a constant part of life and am learning to let go of the things I cannot control.

**10** = I thrive on challenges and love pushing myself past self-imposed "comfort zones." This will work out for the best.

Where are you on this scale and how is that affecting your ability to manage the day to day events of your life? Challenging times cause us to be more reflective and tap the deeper reservoirs of our capacity to achieve. I challenge each of us to shift our mindset toward a 10 on the mindset scale to help us tap the deeper reservoirs of our capacity. Randy Pausch, a Carnegie Mellon professor, authored the book "The Last Lecture" after being diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. Even terminally ill he maintained a "10" mindset and continued to inspire students and the public through his thought provoking and humorous presentations and interviews. Watch his presentation of the Last Lecture on youtube or read the book. Prepare to smile and be inspired to move your mindset up a notch or more and tap your reservoirs of resourcefulness.

"It is not what happens to you, but how you react to it that matters." Epictetus

So how will you choose to respond to the challenges before you? The choice is yours.

## Play Your Way to Productivity

I am off to Phoenix for a conference of Senior Executives. I choose clothes from my summer wardrobe and dig my sandals from the back of my closet where they have been hidden since we last saw temperatures above 70 degrees in Montana months ago. I pull out my travel size liquids, refill them and put them in their quart size bag. I stow my computer in the briefcase where it is easily accessible and choose shoes for the flight that are easy to slip off and on again. I head to the airport early to allow time for parking and moving through security with everyone else going places for work and play. I wheel my bag behind me with my briefcase on top pulling out my driver's license and boarding pass as I wait in line.

After having my boarding pass initialed that I am the person listed and seen in the driver's license photo I move on to the conveyor belt for the x-ray machine. I remove my quart sized bag of liquids from the suitcase, pull out my computer and put it in its own separate bin, put my suitcase on the conveyor belt next to the bin with my computer, add my briefcase and bag of liquids to the belt. I take off my shoes and leave them there too. Holding only my boarding pass I walk through the x-ray machine and smile at the person who wants to look at my boarding pass again. Now I move on to retrieve my bags, put away my computer and liquids. I put my shoes back on and finally am ready to move to the boarding gate to wait for loud announcements and the opportunity to sit in a seat barely large enough to accommodate my average sized frame. And people say travel is not fun anymore. The changes in security and fee structure of charging for bags, seat selection, food and any other conceivable service has dampened the enthusiasm of even travelers off to a long anticipated vacation. Now I am sensing and hearing that same lack of enthusiasm and passion for going to work each day.

Flying may not be fun but work can be fun again.

The economic shift that has forced many organizations to downsize and cut benefits in order to survive has created anxiety, fear and heightened stress at work. Many people are now doing jobs that do not fit their strengths and passions or have added responsibilities from people that have been laid off. We have all lost friends and co-workers that we enjoyed working with and had developed friendships outside of work hours. In the process we have buried the ability to smile, laugh and have fun at work. We are too busy doing the tasks in front of us and worrying about keeping our jobs to find the energy and time for play and relaxation.

The world has indeed shifted in the way we travel and the way we work. Our passions for making a difference and doing what we do best still exist and need to be revived. You don't have time to relax or play, right? You have too much work to get done, the schedule is tight and you already are working long hours. You are thinking - if I take time to play I will just have to work longer tonight. Stop for just a moment and consider this:





Play opens up new channels of creativity and increases the level of satisfaction we experience at work. How employees feel about their company is directly related to their level of productivity and creativity. Research shows that highly motivated employees are up to 127% more productive than averagely motivated employees in high complexity jobs. – Fortune Magazine, January 1998.

Laughter relaxes your muscles, increases blood flow, oxygenates the blood and releases endorphins that make us feel good. Laughter not only makes us feel good but by relaxing the brain it makes it easier to be creative and to collaborate. Solutions that seemed so evasive when we were anxious and stressed now pop up effortlessly in the midst of a good laugh.

Ben Zander, conductor for the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra, and professor at the New England Conservatory of Music, was faced with the same problem every year for 25 years: Teaching students who were in such a chronic state of anxiety over the measurement of their performance, they were reluctant to take creative risks. One night, he sat down with his partner Roz Stone Zander, a therapist, to try to find a solution. They decided the best approach would be to give everyone an A, at the beginning of the course. The A was not intended as a way to measure someone's performance against standards, but as an instrument to open them up to new possibilities. His point here is to help people we work with to remove the barriers that block achievement--and to embrace the mindset of giving an A, by letting go of rigid mindsets that keep people pegged.

Ben and Rosamund Zander, *The Art of Possibility*, Giving an A

Taking time to do nothing lets problems incubate and allows creativity to flow. How many times has a solution come to you in the shower or after your exercise session? Your mind continues to work as your body relaxes and releases the effort of focusing on the issue. What if you gave yourself permission to stare out the window or walk around the block in the middle of the day? Consider the possibility that you may be more productive by incorporating those quick “breaks” than by constant busyness of the seemingly urgent and important tasks in front of you.

What is your barrier equivalent to the “classroom A” that is blocking creativity and achievement? What will you do today to identify and remove those barriers and free yourself and your employees to work in new and creative ways?

## Eight Tips for Vacation Bliss

Do you spend the first few days of your vacation trying to shed stress and worries from work? Here are eight tips to quickly relax and make the most of your precious vacation days.

Vacations are a time to rejuvenate and re-energize. Many companies require vacations to be taken within a certain time period or the time is lost. This is not meant as punishment but as encouragement to take time away for better health. Be a good example to others around you and schedule regular time away from work. To make the most of vacation days try these tips to relax quickly and focus on family and friends. Try them all or choose a few that are readily available to you.

1. Get outside in the natural world, out of buildings and away from desks. Put yourself in a very different environment than your work week.
2. Turn off the alarm clock. Let your body find its natural rhythm for activity.
3. Breathe in the beauty that surrounds us every day and largely goes unnoticed. Look around and breathe.
4. Take a walk and notice everything, leaves on the trees, birds chirping, water rushing by, grass growing...
5. Sit still and focus only on your breath. Let other thoughts and distractions pass through your head as you focus on your breath entering and leaving your body.
6. Feel the clean air in and around you.
7. Plan a fun activity for each day of your vacation. Just the act of planning will help get your mind and body ready for a different experience.
8. Take a nap! Find a hammock for ultimate relaxation.





## What is Your Brick Wall?

*"The brick walls are not there to keep us out; the brick walls are there to give us a chance to show how badly we want something."*

~Randy Pausch, Carnegie Mellon University Professor of Computer Science

We all encounter our own brick walls every day. It is what we do with that encounter that sets the course of our lives. Randy Pausch was only 47 years old when he died from pancreatic cancer. But he was, as the Independent of London put it, "*the dying man who taught America how to live.*" Watch his lecture on youtube: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ji5\\_MgicxSo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ji5_MgicxSo)

I was so inspired by watching "The Last Lecture" given by Randy Pausch in September 2007 that I also read the book of the same title. The lecture and book are filled with inspiration for living a fuller life. As I watched the Olympics each night I heard stories of athletes that have overcome their own brick walls to realize their dream of performing in the Olympics. Many of these athletes have faced injury and challenges that seem totally overwhelming. The lesson I hear is that they set their sights on what was most important to them at the time and took action to realize that dream. We do not all have dreams of being an Olympic caliber athlete but we all have dreams and a vision of what success and a full life looks like for us.

Every day I hear people talking about how unhappy they are in their current jobs or with the circumstances of their life. The last several months of economic difficulties have resulted in many organizations downsizing and employees have had to take on more or different responsibilities. Often, people are left with responsibilities for which they are not well suited. In addition, many of us have lost friends and colleagues that we enjoyed working with. Those remaining in the organization are anxious and fearful of further cuts and changes in the organization. The brick wall many people see seems to surround and overwhelm them into a state of being but not enjoying.

The good news is that I have also seen people, including my clients, find a way to disassemble their brick walls. Despite poor economic conditions there are positions available and many organizations are positioning for the new economy by finding people with the right attributes and skills and putting them in the right places in the organization.

What I hear from my clients is that they feel dramatically better when they start taking steps to address their brick wall. Even tiny steps can help us regain a sense of control and progress. The surprise is that even though they have busy lives and did not think they could fit in one more thing, when they made the commitment to action their lives became fuller and not busier. They are taking actions and becoming open to opportunities that they would not have noticed without the support and change in attitude resulting from hiring a career coach. A career coach is not for everyone but does offer a partner in the journey and support for difficult and confusing actions.

With or without a career coach, everyone can confront and overcome their brick walls. Begin today by asking yourself:

- ⊃ What is my brick wall?
- ⊃ What steps will I take to address that wall and move toward realization of my goal/dream?

## My Personal Action Plan

Choose to take just one step today to create a different result for yourself. Choose any one of the actions that are identified in this book and commit to try it out today. Below is a sampling of the actions included in each of the essays. Click on any of the actions listed to take you back to the essay if you need more information about it.

Choose one, two but not more than three actions to commit to trying this week. Changing behaviors takes focus and practice. Don't try to make too many changes at once. Put a check by the action(s) you choose today and add details to the specific commitment you are making in your [Action Commitment](#) on the next page.

- Dare to dream in vivid color of the life you want to lead.
- Talk to others you work and play with and find someone that loves tasks that you dislike and trade with them for tasks they dislike.
- Choose one practice to listen with intention to one person and write down differences you notice.
- Take five minutes every day this week to clear your mind and do nothing. Write down the inspirations that come to you. Calculate the time you saved.
- Assess the scale of your mindset and choose to move your mindset closer to a 10 on one challenge that is facing you today. Write down any differences you notice.
- Take a quick break three times today. Get out of your chair and walk around the block or the building. Write down any differences you notice at the end of the day.
- Just once today sit still and focus only on your breath. Let other thoughts and distractions pass through your head as you focus on your breath entering and leaving your body.
- Look around and notice one thing outside that you have not noticed before. Take a deep breath and focus on that one thing.
- Ask yourself, what is my brick wall? Just write down anything that comes to you. You don't have to do anything about it today, just make a note of the realization.



## Action Commitment

Today/this week I will commit to:

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
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Sign up for my e-letter to receive monthly tips and tools for growth of you and your team and short reviews of books that I recommend for reading. Just click on the link to start receiving your copy:

[jwirth@riversquest.com](mailto:jwirth@riversquest.com)



## About Jeannine Wirth



Jeannine traded in her boardroom suit and heels for slippers and a desk overlooking the Swan River in Montana to open the doors of RiversQuest Consulting. From her swing by the river she launched her lifelong quest to raise engineer's eyes from their shoes and transform their words from acronyms to meaningful communication.

She is a communication strategist that eliminates communication silos and squirming when emotions surface in engineering organizations by creating tools and programs to overcome their specific blocks to success. She works with civil engineering organizations to identify their biggest blocks and incorporates new actions into their daily activities that help them become an organization of efficient, effective and transparent teams.

If you want to know more.....

After graduating as the first female from the College of Forestry Engineering at the University of Washington she worked in the office and field to become a knowledgeable licensed civil engineer and the first woman Office Manager for a national transportation engineering consultant. As she continued to expand her responsibilities and expertise she became a Regional Manager and the first female member of the firm's Executive Committee. Along the way she discovered her strength and passion for explaining technical engineering jargon and concepts to less experienced engineers, private citizens, executives, and politicians. She used this expertise as the firm's Strategy and Knowledge Officer to identify leadership and communication gaps in offices across the country and develop programs to fill the gaps and expand the firm's learning focus beyond technical to leadership skills.

From her life as EIT to Senior VP and career coach Jeannine offers real world experience to help teams and organizations of engineers fill their leadership pipelines with engineers able to navigate and embrace the constant changes of the world of engineering. RiversQuest Consulting offers [WIRTHwhile Consulting and Coaching](#) to civil engineering organizations across the United States. She looks forward to working with you!

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