

# MASTERING YOUR BALANCE

A GUIDE TO LEADING AND LIVING  
AT YOUR FULL POTENTIAL

Complimentary Chapter



BILL LEIDER & JASON THOMPSON

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AT YOUR FULL POTENTIAL

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# PREFACE

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**A**t their organic core, every organization (including yours) is simply a group of people and some assets, glued together by their purpose and sustained by their *relevance*.

Relevance will determine whether or not your organization remains viable—whether you deserve to exist. In this context, relevance is determined by demonstrating that what you deliver and how you deliver it are needed, wanted, and valued by your customers—and that you can do it profitably. Relevance is the fountain of youth, and it is also a moving landscape. It can be fickle and fleeting. You can be relevant one year and filing bankruptcy the next. That is increasingly true today in our world of rapid, continuous, and disruptive change. The changes we are experiencing are caused by more than just technology; they are a combination of politics, geopolitics, the effects of climate change, societal changes throughout the world, global versus nationalistic ideologies and policies, major movements like #MeToo and Black Lives Matter, a diversifying, multigenerational workforce, increasing income disparity that threatens the future of the middle class, trade policies (such as tariffs), and our education system and its ability to focus on helping to prepare people for meaningful jobs. And if those things were not enough, as I write this, the world is facing the largest pandemic—COVID-19—we’ve experienced in over one hundred years.

Relevance exists on two levels. The first level ranges from survival to adequate success. It is pretty good, but not exceptional. It's where most companies (and people) live. Those at the top of that level often adjust their perspective and rationalize their achievements as representing excellence. They don't. It just means they have settled for less than their full potential.

The second level of relevance talks to an exceptional level of success that's rare but achievable. It's the arena where true superstars in every field of endeavor play. It requires a constant state of awareness, a high level of the kind of cultural wisdom and strategic adaptability needed to become and remain exceptional, and a commitment to act in ways that continue to sustain that level of relevance.

Understanding the context of what it takes to attain that second level of exceptionalism is what this book is about.

Many of the most popular self-help books frame the ways to improve by using examples of great leaders and achievers. They tell inspiring stories about what those people have accomplished and advise their readers to emulate them. "Do what they do, and you, too, can achieve greatness."

Here's the problem with that framework. You are not them. You didn't have the same developmental experiences they had, the same influences, the same way of feeling, and the same motivations at various pivotal points in their lives. You might not have the same aptitudes or the same strengths and weaknesses. So how in the world are you supposed to emulate them? That is why most self-help books primarily help their authors receive royalties from their sale.

You will be much better served if you learn the elements of brain and behavioral science that can enable you to embrace neuroplasticity (the rewiring of your brain), and become aware of and minimize your confirmation biases (your unconscious, preexisting beliefs that prevent you from accepting new ideas that challenge them). When you do that, you will come to know what kinds of resources you will need (human and capital), how to knock down your self-limiting beliefs about what is possible, and how to acquire the skills to help you succeed beyond your imagination. Then, with the requisite amount of commitment, effort, and persistence, you can become the best possible version of yourself. From that place, you can learn more about why you were put on this planet: how you can make a difference and realize your potential. If you make wise choices, you'll find fulfillment along the way.

I will show you what I believe is the most effective model to help you do all that. It is grounded in *Mastering Your Balance*—which we at Axies Group define as an aligned state of readiness. The state of your balance and the six elements needed to have a balanced organization (the primary content of this book)—are not a set of skills. Rather, they provide a context for creating a reality and honing your abilities in ways that, if truly mastered, will equip you to achieve levels of success you never imagined—and enjoy continued *relevance*.

The components of balance are not new. You already operate in an organization in which all the elements of balance presently exist in some form, at some level of effectiveness, and with some degree of consciousness. The question is, what are those levels and forms? The answer is vitally important in helping you master your balance and maximize your potential.



An important purpose of this book lies in helping you clearly see how well you are currently functioning with regard to each element of balance, individually and organically (all the elements working together). When you are able to see that, you will come to understand why you are where you are, where your (likely unseen) opportunities lie to maximize your potential, and where to wisely commit your resources to achieve that potential.

You will emerge from reading this book enriched with a newfound sense and sensitivity to the context of what Mastering Your Balance can do to improve your success, what it feels like to go from where you are to an exceptional level of achievement, and for most of you, a compelling sense of commitment to go there.

As you capture that sense of why you are where you are, you'll be able to reflect on how the decisions you made are based in large part on your beliefs about what is possible, what is prudent, what is too risky or too tame, what you are capable of, and what is beyond your abilities.

As you think about the potential within your grasp when you become a more balanced organization, you might also come to realize that *you are not your self-limiting beliefs*. You have them (almost everyone does), but they are not who you are. They don't define you; they don't limit you—unless you let them. The human experience is one of awareness—awareness of all you are exposed to, all you can imagine, all you can achieve—based on your ability, your willingness, and your creativity to gather and harness the resources needed to achieve—not diminished by your self-limiting beliefs.

## PREFACE

So, open your mind to experience a new level of awareness and the possibilities that surround you. Let's begin.



# CHAPTER 1

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## Why Balance Matters Now More Than Ever

### WHAT IS GREATNESS?

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**G**reatness is a level of being. It is unmarred by changing circumstances. It says: We are always capable of being better today than yesterday, and we can be better tomorrow than we are today. Greatness is sustainable over time; it is not indelibly stamped by a single accomplishment. Greatness is a lifelong endeavor, born of commitment, fueled by passion, traveling along a road dotted with milestones of achievement, while avoiding detours of seductively appealing distractions that promise instant rewards but lead to dead ends of destruction. The milestones are not destinations; they are rest stops to help you rejoice, refuel, and resume your journey. Because the road to greatness has no end.

What makes greatness seem achievable by only a few and seemingly impossible for everyone else? Is greatness preordained? Is it a winning-the-lottery kind of luck? Privilege? Or is it something else, and if so, what is that something?

Perhaps you can achieve greatness by simply working harder and having more perseverance than everyone with whom you compete. Those qualities are needed, but they are not the entire

answer. Many people and companies work hard and are still labeled as “average” or “okay but not great.” Can greatness be defined by the depth and scope of your subject matter expertise? Only in your own mind. Genius and greatness are two different qualities. Wait, what about a superior business model and a unique value proposition that stand you head and shoulders above everyone else’s? Surely that will label you as great. It will certainly take you part of the way, but only if another piece of the greatness puzzle is organically pervasive throughout your organization.

If that mystery piece is working well, it is always present and barely noticed—at least not consciously. It’s not part of your product development process, your manufacturing systems, your hiring practices, your sales and marketing plans, or your high-level strategies. Yet it shapes all of those elements and more. Its presence will provide you with the context within which greatness lives. Its absence will assure that, no matter how good you are in all the other areas, greatness will always lie just beyond your reach.

What is that missing piece? It is Mastering Your Balance.

What is balance?

## **A MASTERING BALANCE PRIMER**

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Balance is a state of aligned readiness. It is the kind of readiness that enables you to see and seize opportunities quickly and react to crises before they become costly.

Mastering Your Balance is meant to define the actions you must take, the departures from your comfort zones you must

make and the skills you must acquire and employ to reach that state of mastery that will define your organization as truly exceptional. Done well, you will experience an endless quest, because exceptionalism is only sustainable if you can continuously adapt to an ever-changing world.

The purpose of this book is to show you how Mastering Your Balance will enable any organization (or individual) to live, learn, and grow more successfully than one that is out of balance—even slightly. An organization, and the people in it, that have mastered balance are able to operate at their full potential. They are higher performers. They adapt well to changes in all manner and magnitude and those that represent both challenges and opportunities. Masterfully balanced organizations are always better able to avoid seductive distractions and remain focused on what matters.

These are the elements of balance:

- **Vision**
- **Values**
- **Values-driven leadership**
- **Culture**
- **Strategy**
- **Greater purpose**

Mastering Your Balance requires continuous, conscious awareness. You must become highly proficient in establishing and living the elements of balance noted above. These elements, taken together, already exist pervasively throughout your

company. They provide context for what you do—at every level. If any of the elements are out of alignment, they will cause your organization to perform dysfunctionally. If they are well aligned, they will help enable you to perform at your full potential.

If you think of balance in the context of static equilibrium, please put that belief aside. Instead, embrace the concept of movement and growth in a world of continuous change.

This book will help you develop a deeper understanding of the elements of balance, so you become more consciously aware of how they work together and what can happen when they don't. You will gain a greater sense of the skills and disciplines you will need to achieve and sustain a high level of balance. You will become more adaptive—critically necessary individually, structurally, strategically, and culturally. You will see how your blind spots (we all have them) are hindering your ability to achieve your full potential—and how to uncover and deal with them.

For many years, the media has periodically showered us with stories of the devastating results some iconic organizations had experienced when they suffered from poor management oversight, had inferior leadership, abandoned their integrity to achieve financial goals, or were driven by unbridled greed. Nice list, but it's focused on symptoms. The root causes of their disasters have not been accurately framed. Instead, we have read and heard about people—leaders and followers alike—appropriately found guilty of terrible acts—with no understanding that all these misdeeds are signs of a deeper root cause. *They lost their balance.*

This book will lay out the reasons why, and what they could/should have done instead. The processes are simple in their essence, and hard as hell to live by. But you will see that had they done those things, the problems could have been foreseen and dealt with before they inflicted untold damages and unimagined costs.

Today, if you were to ask anyone in any of those organizations whether the commitment and work needed to maintain balance would have been worth it, the vast majority of the people would quickly say *yes*. Now, let me introduce you to how Mastering Your Balance works.

## **HOW MASTERING BALANCE WORKS**

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The six elements of balance listed above are not new. They've been with us as long as formal organizations have existed. They all exist in every company in some fashion. They might be consciously known throughout the organization and formally documented, with top-of-mind awareness and accountability. Or they exist unconsciously, informally, orally, and implicitly—with inconsistent accountability. Inconsistent accountability is a breeding ground for multiple agendas. Some people apply various elements of balance situationally to pursue fatally seductive short-term objectives. The results of their actions become visible only when the shit of egregious activities hits the fan of public outrage.

Some of you may believe all the elements of balance are working well throughout your organization. They have contributed to your success. Your plans are working well. You are a leader in your industry, outperforming your competitors. Your growth



is impressive. Even if that is true, the best companies and the wisest leaders know there is always room for improvement. This book will address some of the nuances that will help guide you to that rare level above excellence.

For the rest of us (the other 99 percent), deep down, you know on some level, you have much to learn about yourself and your organization. Learning those things will help you uncover a wealth of opportunities to raise your own performance bars, begin to transform your organization, and discover what it means to operate at your full potential.

You will harness the power of the six elements of balance based on how and how well you make them seamlessly work together. Just as you don't have to think about remembering to inhale and exhale to breathe, it is possible for you to have the elements of balance ingrained, aligned, and operating at an instinctive level. Developing a deeper understanding of how to go from where you are now to mastery is the journey you are about to take.

To begin, we will first explore how people typically think and what they do that makes them function as an organization from inside the box. You will be given a magic tool you can use to explore how you can achieve seemingly impossible or implausible goals or uncomfortable changes from the status quo. As you read about all the elements of Mastering Your Balance, you will see how to use that tool repeatedly and how you can apply it in your organization.

You will understand why a clear vision can give you a sense of clarity that will serve as your North Star. You will use it

to guide your organization toward its long-term legacy. Vision can be your rock of wisdom. You will also see how a lack of a clear vision can infect your organization with a loss of clarity that, in turn, can blur the focus of your strategic goals and take you off course. That same lack of clarity can (and often does) open the doors of your culture to multiple agendas, and the behavioral dysfunctions that accompany them. That, in turn, reduces productivity. And it is all often insidious. It remains unfelt for so long that it becomes your “normal.”

You will learn how your stated values, in the absence of measurable accountability for living them, become toothless suggestions. That reality is a fundamental cause of lapses in conduct, performance, and strategic direction that can have consequences ranging from annoying to complete collapse. You will explore how your values shape your culture and how that translates into the quality of your performance, your ability to achieve strategic objectives, your creativity (or the lack thereof), your effectiveness at recruiting and retaining employees—and more.

Values-driven leadership is the art of making everyone in the organization measurably accountable for living your values. This book will show you the bottom-line value of measurable accountability. Values-driven leadership is the antidote to having your values become mere guidelines instead of requirements. You will become more aware of the barriers to creating equal accountability and their cost/performance tradeoffs. You will examine some real-life disasters stemming from nonaccountability that are head-scratchily apparent when seen through the lens of hindsight. And you will learn how you can have the foresight to prevent needless horror stories from occurring.

You will see the many ways in which your culture defines you and determines the kinds of strategies you can achieve (or not)—and why. You will see how your culture (and your values) affect the kinds of talent you can successfully recruit, engage, and retain. You will learn how creative, or not, you can be, what levels of thought diversity are possible. You will realize how those things can affect your growth and your abilities to adapt to change and set and achieve ambitious goals. They all combine to either limit or expand your potential growth and success. You will see how and why you might be holding on to traditional, outmoded cultural practices that have become counter-productive and what you can do about it. Your enlightened view of the breadth and power of your culture just might produce some profoundly mind-expanding revelations.

You will understand strategies in the context of how they align with the other elements of balance (or not) and how that will determine the degree of difficulty and unnecessary costs you will incur, and added time you may need to achieve unaligned objectives, or possibly not being able to achieve certain goals at all. And, you will see how your strategies can be aligned with where you want to take your organization (toward your vision).

Finally, you will see how defining and aligning your greater purpose with the other elements of balance can inspire you, keep your organization relevant (a key to long-term success), and provide a foundation for personal fulfillment—an important contributor to employee longevity, productivity, and morale.

When all that is done, you will tie it all together to paint a picture of what a balanced organization looks like in real life. You'll see the difference between *acceptable* and *exceptional*. And you will

get an enlightened picture of where you currently stand. It's the kind of picture the people inside your organization might never show you—even if they see it.

Here's the encouraging reality underpinning all of this. Reaping the benefits is not a question of doing it all or doing nothing. The truth is that no one does it all perfectly. There will always be gaps and temporary lapses. Your path to Mastering Your Balance will be incremental. You can determine the scope and pace. Each insight you gain and apply, each thing you do, each change you make—large or small—will produce measurable gains greater than you ever imagined.