

## Praise for *Rare Leadership*

Leaders who are unloving and unaware of the importance of relationships can do a great deal of harm—I have seen it. I commend Dr. Wilder and Dr. Warner for their innovative and deeply compassionate approach to helping leaders become more loving, more mature, and more effective.

—**GARY CHAPMAN**, PhD, bestselling author, *The 5 Love Languages*<sup>®</sup>

There are simple, common reasons leaders burn out or blow up—or simply lose their joy. I am a leader; I’ve counseled many leaders. This book rings so true, and *hopeful*, because it offers immensely wise and practical help, together with enough illustrations to show us the way.

—**JOHN ELDREDGE**, author of *Wild at Heart* and *Moving Mountains*, president of Ransomed Heart Ministries

It’s rare to find a book that links “joy,” modern brain science, and biblical wisdom as a model for leadership. *Rare Leadership* not only does that well—it succeeds in giving leaders four habits that can’t help but unleash joy and greater effectiveness and authenticity and endurance in their relationships with others. You’ll come away from reading this book knowing much more about how we are “fearfully and wonderfully” made—and far better equipped to lead and love the way Jesus did.

—**JOHN TRENT**, PhD, author of *The Blessing* and *LifeMapping*, Gary D. Chapman Chair of Marriage and Family Ministry and Therapy, Moody Theological Seminary

Regardless of how many leadership books you have read, *Rare Leadership* provides refreshing, challenging and practical lessons for developing leaders (and becoming one) that I will be using for myself and my team.

—**PAUL WHITE**, PhD, psychologist, coauthor, *The 5 Languages of Appreciation at Work*, *Rising Above a Toxic Workplace*, and *Sync or Swim*

I love it. I love it when I don't have to work through the fluff and fight the smog to get to the essentials in a book. *Rare Leadership* by Marcus Warner and Jim Wilder is just that—rare. The content is fresh. The presentation is crisp. The concepts are portable. The results will be obvious.

—**SAM CHAND**, leadership consultant and author of *Leadership Pain*

*Rare Leadership* deserves its place with the great leadership books of our time. What *Good to Great* did for organizations, *Rare Leadership* does for individual leaders. It provides the research-based science driving the real-world disciplines and practices of exceptional leaders. While John Maxwell gave us laws for leadership, Wilder and Warner have provided the tools to retrain our brains and grow our hearts into the leaders that our teams will want to follow.

—**DAWN WHITESTONE**, MA, LMHC, president of Relational Wealth Builders

This book provides a process driven approach to loving others well through leadership. Instead of just another list of leadership to-dos or no-no's, this book combines reasoned, accessible brain science and sound Christ-centered relationship principles to provide a valuable roadmap ahead for those willing to apply its truths.

—**MATTHEW TURVEY**, PsyD, associate director, WinShape Marriage

Healthy leadership is rare leadership in most organizations. And yet the search continues as people around the world look for the secret ingredients to become centered, effective, and transformational leaders. Marcus Warner and Jim Wilder's take the reader to the destination they desire. Their insightful research touches an inflection point that the RARE leadership we seek comes from within and to achieve this we just need to change our mindset.

—**ROBERT DICKIE III**, president, Crown, author of *The Leap*

*Rare Leadership* uniquely captures what it takes to be an authentic leader with immeasurable impact, by bringing transformational truths to the marketplace. If you desire to be a leader who ignites transformation this book is a profoundly relevant and timely resource for our generation.

—**TINA DYER**, vice president of a Fortune 500 company,  
leadership and professional development consultant

Marcus Warner / Jim Wilder

# Rare Leadership

**4 Uncommon Habits** for Increasing Trust, Joy,  
and Engagement in the People You Lead

**MOODY PUBLISHERS**

CHICAGO

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## Foreword

“**HOW MANY OF YOU** have ever worked for a terrible boss?” This is the question I often ask audiences when I start my talks on leadership. How would you respond? I love the topic of leadership because leaders make things happen. Leaders affect all of us, whether we lead, follow, or try to stay out of the way. History is the story of leaders—good and bad ones that have done amazing good and terrible evil. I have a huge passion to help people starting out in leadership get on the right track and not make the awful mistakes that make life miserable for followers.

When I ask that “terrible boss” question, without fail, ninety percent of the audience raises their hands and rolls their eyes. I also get a lot of soft moans. It is like they are saying, “Hans, if only you knew the half of it!”

Why are there so many leaders out there that are really tough to trust and follow? Honestly, I think it has to do with their lack of being emotionally healthy. One of the biggest mistakes people make in the realm of leadership is focusing too much on “*what am I to do?*” as opposed to “*who am I to be?*” Yes, I confess that in my thirty years of leadership—practicing it, writing books about it, and teaching the topic—I have often fallen into that performance trap. And face it—most boards evaluate their leaders based on performance and results.

I so much appreciate this refreshing book you hold in your hands,

*Rare Leadership*. Dr. Jim Wilder and Dr. Marcus Warner have given us an amazing resource that goes right to the heart of healthy leadership. The thesis of this book is that “rare leadership” is the fruit of four uncommon habits related to emotional intelligence. These are 1) remain relational, 2) act like yourself, 3) return to joy, and 4) endure hardship.

Why is this kind of leadership *rare*? It is rare because it focuses on being a healthy person under the water line. In recent years I have become more convinced than ever that being an effective, healthy leader is more about your EQ than your IQ. It is about who you are, not what you do. The four uncommon habits that Jim Wilder and Marcus Warner describe in this book are groundbreaking in this space of emotional intelligence in leadership.

In case *emotional intelligence* (EQ) is new to you, it is what I call the soft side of leadership. It is all about the kind of person we are underneath the surface, and how we interact with others. It’s known as EQ as opposed to IQ, which is our intelligence quotient. Success in leadership has so much more to do with EQ than IQ. We all have seen a lot of really smart people utterly fail as leaders. Through some of my own failures, I’ve come to believe that emotional intelligence is essential for effective, healthy leadership. The key word there is “healthy.”

People don’t like to follow dysfunctional leaders. Sometimes they have to, but they don’t want to. I could tell you a lot of horror stories I’ve collected over the years of individuals that have been horrible employers, team leaders, and bosses. Isn’t it amazing how many dysfunctional people can become the boss or team leader? Why do they get up there when they are so unhealthy? It could be money, politics, or just the accidental fact that they got there first. What *you* need to focus on is becoming a great, healthy leader as you grow in your influence.

Traditionally, when being evaluated for a job, managers tended to look for the hard skills such as experience, degrees, training, and how well they could perform a task. But according to a ton of new

research, performance success in leadership is one-third IQ and two-thirds EQ. Or to put it another way, emotional intelligence counts for twice as much as IQ and technical skills combined to be successful in leading others.

This is not another one of those high-octane type “A” leadership performance books. It is about matters of your heart and the person you are becoming as a healthy leader that people will follow with joy. I highly recommend this book to every leader that wants to make a mark and leave a God-honoring legacy.

DR. HANS FINZEL

Author of *The Top Ten Mistakes Leaders Make*

Highlands Ranch, Colorado

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## Preface

**I (MARCUS)** wanted to write this book because I needed it so much when I was pastoring, and because I see so many Christian organizations struggling with the same challenges again and again. Most of these leadership challenges have less to do with strategic planning than the ability to handle difficult relationships and upsetting emotions.

Once I knew I wanted to write the book, there was no question who I wanted to work with me. It had to be Jim Wilder. Most of what I have learned about the issues taught in this book were ideas and practices I picked up from him.

If you are the sort of leader who just wants the basics as quickly as possible, I suggest you start reading with Part 2—“Building RARE Leadership.” If you are the sort who likes to understand the philosophical foundations and paradigms beneath the practices, then read it all.

Too often leaders are chosen simply on gifting, education, and experience. We give lip service to the idea of maturity, but do we really know how to assess maturity? More to the point, do we have a clear strategy for helping people grow maturity? Giving them good information and holding them accountable for their choices is not enough. There is so much more that needs to be woven into the fabric of Christian organizations.

We hope this book challenges you. Even more, we hope it sets out a clear path to how people grow and how you can experience both personal and corporate transformation.

# Introduction

**YOU’VE PROBABLY HEARD** the term “emotional intelligence,” or EQ. If you’re familiar with the concept, you know that emotional intelligence can make you a better leader and help you build a healthy organization. But did you also know that people with a high degree of emotional intelligence earn an average of \$29,000 more per year than people with a low degree of emotional intelligence?<sup>1</sup> I would extrapolate from this data that they earn this premium because they do significantly more than their peers to realize their organization’s mission.

But whether you’re leading a multimillion-dollar corporation or launching a new church plant, you can benefit from this book and the profound insights shared by Dr. Jim Wilder and Dr. Marcus Warner. The thesis of this book is that the fruit of four uncommon habits related to emotional intelligence is a *dramatic increase in trust, joy, and engagement in the people you lead.*

Perhaps the term “aha moment” is overused. Yet I suspect you also have those books that have completely changed the way you’ve approached your life, your work, and your leadership. Among that very short list of real game-changers for me are:

*The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*  
*Getting Things Done*  
*The Power of Full Engagement*

There were nuggets I took from each of these books that really changed the way I saw things.

Along with these game-changing books, I've had the privilege of knowing Jim Wilder for over twenty-five years. Jim codeveloped the groundbreaking "Life Model" whose principles inspired this book. He is the coauthor of the book *Living from the Heart Jesus Gave You*, which has sold over 100,000 copies and been translated into eleven languages. He has taught leaders all around the world to spread joy through relational skills. And his work has changed my life and leadership.

The four uncommon habits that he and Dr. Marcus Warner describe in this book have also had a tremendous impact on my family, my career, and the teams I have been privileged to lead. Here, Dr. Wilder and Dr. Warner combine experience working with leaders and churches, biblical insights, and the latest brain science research to explore what it means to be a RARE leader. Briefly, here's what that means:

### **RETURN TO JOY**

The idea that joy is the ultimate jet fuel, the purest and most potent source of motivation, is a realization that unleashes tremendous potential in you and your team. Think about yourself for a moment. How productive are you when you are stuck in one of the six unpleasant emotions hardwired into our brains: fear, anger, disgust, shame, sadness, hopelessness? High-performing athletes succeed because they have a quick recovery time. The same is true in leadership. A well-trained brain can return to joy in ninety seconds. A less well-trained brain can take hours, days, even weeks. What is the toll in creativity and productivity of all the lost time while you or those you lead remain stuck in one or more of what we call these "big six" emotions? (See page 209 for a quick guide to RARE terms and concepts.)

### **ACT LIKE YOURSELF**

Have you ever seen a display of uncontrolled anger improve the performance of a team? I've never seen that. I have seen uncontrolled anger destroy an organization.

I grew up prone to anger. I'm an excitable extrovert, proud of my Italian heritage, which many link with effusiveness—including effusiveness with anger. Years ago Jim Wilder taught me this idea of “acting like myself.” It was part of a series of questions he suggested I ask myself when faced with a strong, unpleasant emotion. What is it like me and my people to do when I feel a certain emotion? In other words, *What would the person God made me to be do? What would Jesus do? What would the people of God functioning at their best do?* Jim gives the example of Jesus becoming so angry one time that He healed someone. One thing I learned that always stuck with me was that it is like my best self to protect others from my anger.

I've been in many situations where this inability of a leader to act like “his best self” has led to a downward spiral in morale, resulting in the loss of very capable employees. Each of these leaders had a long list of fine qualities. They might be charming and fun to be around, able to recruit very qualified talent and highly intelligent. Yet each one experienced those moments when something would set them off. One might experience a surge of anger, which would completely eclipse his ability to remain his usual charming, fun, relational self. In these moments he would fail to protect others from his anger. Some fired talented team members in outbursts of rage. Others rattled team members to the point that they lost their ability to perform (a phenomenon well documented in *Multipliers: How the Best Leaders Make Everyone Smarter*). Other leaders' occasional tirades created such a climate of fear and anxiety that some employees lost all desire to perform.

### REMAIN RELATIONAL

I began my career as a very task-oriented individual. It was easy for me to sell to accountants and attorneys who were also very task-oriented. It was harder for me to sell to highly relational people. I had to learn how to tell stories. I still remember practicing a story about something that happened to me on a golf course so that I could tell it as needed during a sales call. The idea that *the relationship is more*

*important than the problem* took a long time for me to believe, and I still haven't mastered it. If you are like me, you've been rewarded for being a problem solver. Knocking down the barriers to get results comes easily to you. But figuring out how to develop a deep and lasting culture that furthers and deepens your organization's mission while building its capacity is a challenge. For some of us, it is almost a foreign language.

But here I am reminded of something Stephen Covey talks about that I have never forgotten: the idea of production capacity versus production. You can focus on production at the expense of capacity and get stellar short-term results. But long-term results will always require investing in capacity. If relationships are the root of joy, and joy is the jet fuel of high-performing teams, it follows that learning to remain relational is a key factor in creating high-performing teams and building healthy churches and organizations.

### ENDURE HARDSHIP

In some ways this may at first seem like one of the easiest lessons for high achievers—or church leaders schooled in the biblical language of struggle and sacrifice. We all know the phrase “no pain, no gain.” But this idea of enduring suffering is deeper than that. Jim Wilder often calls it learning to suffer well. We are going to suffer. Our Master suffered. *How do we learn to stay relational and continue to act like ourselves, like the person God made us to be, during suffering?* If we don't learn how to do this we will avoid suffering or spread our suffering to our team. In some ways this might include being “the bigger person.” The narcissist leader says, “If anyone is going to suffer, it's not going to be me,” and turns the suffering onto the team. The RARE leader says, “If anyone is going to suffer, can it be me? I'm good at it. I know how to do it. I can model it to the team.” And this RARE leader can walk with team members in their suffering.

My wish for you is that you will find in these pages those “aha” moments that make you say, “Yes, this makes so much sense. Somehow I knew this was true, but just couldn't put my finger on it.”

I pray that you will develop these four uncommon habits and that they will be a blessing to you, your family, and your organization for generations to come.

JIM MARTINI  
CEO of Life Model Works

# Leadership at the Speed of Joy

*Wisdom from the Bible, discoveries from brain science*

**IF YOU ARE** a student of leadership, you know about the importance of engagement and emotional intelligence. You have also read a wide variety of case studies that tell us what successful leaders do. What you probably don't know is that recent developments in brain science now reveal that leadership skills are learned in a different way and in a different area of the brain than management skills and academic studies. We now know how leaders can train this powerful brain system to produce full engagement in their team and develop a high level of emotional intelligence that keeps them plugged into a renewable, high-octane source of motivation.

In this book, we want to help you in two ways: 1) We want you to understand the fast-track brain mechanism that learns and distributes leadership skills, and 2) we want to help you train the leadership system in your brain using four core habits of effective leaders. These four habits will cause your emotional intelligence to soar. As we saw in the introduction, these habits can be remembered with the word RARE. They are:

Remain Relational  
Act Like Yourself  
Return to Joy  
Endure Hardship Well

Many leaders, business people, pastors, team leaders and influencers never receive any training in leadership. This contributes to mistaking management for leadership. Management is the efficient accomplishment of tasks. Leadership is producing and maintaining full engagement from our group in what matters. The RARE leaders we wish to emulate inspire us because they do this well. Now, we will show you how it is done.

### ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS VS. PEOPLE SKILLS

Dr. Chris Shaw has over thirty years of experience training leaders and pastors across Latin America. With two devotional books to his credit, his daily devotional is read by over 6,000 website visitors a day.

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The term “lead” has come to mean organizational skills rather than people skills.

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Dr. Shaw edits a leadership magazine for both men and women leaders with a subscription of 185,000 readers.

Chris holds his doctorate in leadership development with a thesis on *A Philosophy of Education for Leadership Formation through Theological Studies* at Fuller Seminary. His master’s degree was in Christian formation and

discipleship. He began teaching as full-time staff at the Buenos Aires Bible Institute and this position opened international doors to conferences where Dr. Shaw draws crowds of pastors.

We asked Chris for his observations on leadership. Chris immediately observed the problems caused by mistaking management skills for leadership. He says:

*Leadership has become heavily influenced by managerial models, so that the term “lead” has come to mean organizational skills rather than people skills.*

What Chris did not learn in his doctorate program (that we now know) is how leadership skills are learned. The brain uses a “fast-track” process for relational leadership skills and a very different

“slow-track” process for management skills. The “fast track” operates at speeds above the level of conscious thought and primarily governs relational reality. The “slow track” is what we notice consciously. It monitors results and provides explanations and solutions to problems we face. (These are challenging concepts, we know. We will explain these ideas more fully at the end of this chapter.<sup>1</sup> For now, understand that both learning processes are super-important.)

But the how is less important than the what—the impact on our organizations and on real people. Chris sees the impact on both pastors and churches. He says:

*The Kingdom, however, is not about organizations, projects or even ministries. It's about people, and so leadership, in Kingdom terms, would refer to the development of the kind of “people skills” that would help those we have been invited to walk with to achieve their full potential in Christ. This is rare in many church leaders today. Despite the fact that the Church is all about people, I find that many pastors have woefully inadequate people skills, and are often even uncomfortable around others, unless it is within the context of a programmed meeting. Leadership, for many pastors, is exercised from a platform whilst holding onto a microphone.*

Dr. Shaw began his journey by becoming an assistant pastor to a church that was actively planting congregations in the slums of Buenos Aires. In this context he began training young leaders—a practice he continues to this day. He began to notice very quickly that lectures, classes, and Bible studies were needed, but that something was missing.

*Early on in my pastoral experience I discovered how easy it was to experience painful loneliness whilst being surrounded by a community of believers. The loneliness seemed to point to the fact that many of the congregations that we would describe as communities of faith were really just gatherings of people who happened to meet in the same building at regular times throughout the*

*week. Multiple encounters with Christians who felt used (and sometimes discarded) by their leaders moved me to find another leadership model. There was no real interest in them as individuals, aside from the way they fit into or furthered the leader's personal projects. As a resident chaplain at the Bible Institute, I counseled dozens of disenchanted Christians, and it strengthened my resolve to explore alternative leadership training methods.*

*I was disappointed as a student (and later as a member of faculty) to notice how uninterested many professors were in the lives of their students. Some couldn't even be bothered to learn the names of their students. All their focus seemed to be on getting through their material. When I began to work as part of the faculty I wanted to be a shepherd to my students, and not just somebody who delivered lectures.*

*Because I speak at a lot of conferences I guess many people would evaluate my success or failure by the number of people I am able to attract to a given event. Perhaps the most frequent phrase I hear, as I travel around Latin America, is how blessed people feel by what I have shared through a presentation, or in my books. My greatest change has been the crystallizing of a concept that I have worked with for many years: "Leaders influence more through who they are than by what they do." Today I place much greater value on the informal moments at an event than the formal times, because they offer me precious opportunities to interact with people on a personal level.*

What is that mysterious thing that happens when people interact at a personal level? How does it work? Who taught you leadership, and did you learn how to develop leadership under you for the teams you lead? How can we become more effective? The RARE leaders whose team we would love to join, and whose style we would like to emulate, lead by some means we cannot quite fully capture. We can see they have built a strong repertoire of positive relational habits that produce trust, joy, and engagement around them. Chris could intuitively tell by his own growth that relationship played an important

part. (Actually, intuition is another brain process that runs in the fast track. We call it intuition because our mind figures things out *before* we are consciously aware that our brain has been figuring.)

For Chris, his leadership development began when he was invited to join a small, home-based congregation. Chris found great inspiration and encouragement to develop leadership in this relational environment. In time, they founded a leadership magazine, traveled and taught pastors, and even ran a small publishing house. I (Jim) began to travel and teach as part of their international training ministry, too. By then the team was reaching over 60,000 pastors who subscribed to their printed leadership magazine.

Then it happened. The organization was devastated by moral failures. The shakeup that followed left behind distrust, low joy, and a disintegrating ministry for Chris to lead. These are the moments when RARE leadership is required. Chris says,

*The focus of my work over the next three years became stabilizing the ministry and helping staff to recover from the shock precipitated by this crisis. We began a major process of reorganizing and renewing the focus of the ministry so that it continues to be an effective tool for leadership development in a rapidly changing world.*

How could this leadership failure happen? Two observations will help us at this point. First, the team had all the information, education, and experience needed. They had even heard the Life Model taught and explained multiple times by me, the author. However, all the information had been learned on the slow-track brain system we use for management and not on the fast-track system we use for leadership and guidance.

We have observed that leaders often believe that *understanding* an idea is sufficient to make that idea a reality in their own lives. Many times, our years of success blind us to important flaws. Hidden flaws bring us to our second observation. The common ministry leadership model Chris had learned and distributed through teaching, conferences, counseling advice, and publications gave no importance to joy

levels in leaders' lives. Joy is a delight in our relationships with God and others. While faithfulness to God, Scripture, and others seemed important, the loving joy from fellowship and family became an afterthought. Dropping joy levels create risks the way dry conditions affect a forest. Many leadership failures can be traced to declining joy levels in leadership teams, marriages, and families. As joy drops, the "fire danger" reaches critical levels without being noticed. RARE leadership is powered by joy. (We'll explain how to monitor "joy levels" later in the book.<sup>2</sup>)

We have found in our study of Scripture and brain science that joy, that feeling of well-being in the deepest part of our soul, is primarily relational. To the human brain, joy is always relational. Even those times of solitude as we dig in our garden or read an absorbing book are relational experiences. More about this later.<sup>3</sup>

We might say that leadership travels at the speed of joy. Joy levels are important in at least three ways.

1. The fast track in the brain is motivated to learn through joy.
2. People with emotional intelligence and relational skills always create joy around them.
3. Leadership skills do not transfer from one person to another in the absence of joy.

Leadership that neglects joy rapidly becomes management instead of leadership. Most people are moved into leadership because they are effective workers. They do more or better work than others. They often do not distinguish improving work productivity from leadership. As leaders manage increasingly larger workloads and focus energy on better productivity, objectives, and results, they easily miss the decline in joy levels in their lives, families, and work teams.

A discussion of how our joy gets low will have to wait until later in this book<sup>4</sup> when we examine the four RARE habits of great leaders more carefully. You can be sure that low joy involves a failed training strategy in how we learn to deal relationally with unpleasant emotions. Chris now says:

*The concepts I have learned through The Life Model have provided some of the answers that I have sought for years. All of the fast-track skills that I have been learning just make so much sense, in light of the priorities that God seems to have been stressing for my own ministry over these past decades. If the Kingdom is all about people, then learning how to stay in relationships, through thick and thin, has got to be something where we excel and that we teach well. The call to leadership for us, then, would seem to be a call to walk with a group of people, as we strive to make our relationship with God visible in the context of the challenges that each day brings our way.*

### THE FOUR HABITS OF RARE LEADERS

As we have already seen, the thesis of this book is that there are four uncommon habits developed by high-capacity leaders that distinguish them from “common leaders” whose attention is diverted by problem-solving and driving toward results. These four habits all relate to the fast-track system in the brain.

**R—REMAIN RELATIONAL.** Common leaders tend to be problem focused. They are driven by fear of failing to get results and solve problems. Consequently, they value results and solutions more than relationships. This tends to leave them isolated, overwhelmed, and operating out of a motivational system in the brain that virtually guarantees their pace will not be sustainable. RARE leaders have trained themselves to operate from a completely different brain system that we’ll look at in a moment. This alternative brain system and the habits that it cultivates help them keep their relationships bigger than their problems.

**A—ACT LIKE YOURSELF.** As a leader, when I don’t know how to act like myself, people don’t know what to expect from me. They never know when I’ll be angry or sullen, anxious or upbeat. Thus, they learn to walk around me on eggshells as they wait to see which leader they are going to get. RARE leaders have a consistency of character anchored in a positive core identity that lets people know that whatever emotions I may face, I still know how to act like myself.

**R—RETURN TO JOY.** Perhaps the single biggest factor in producing sustainable motivation is the leader’s ability to return to joy from a variety of negative emotions. Leaders who can experience upsetting emotions such as shame, anger, fear, and despair—yet possess the skills to recover quickly and help their people recover as well—are rarely overwhelmed by the situations they face. Groups that learn how to face these emotions and recover collectively grow a strength that can face almost any problem.

**E—ENDURE HARDSHIP WELL.** In some ways, this is the goal of the whole process. Leaders who learn to suffer well are truly rare. Most of us are doing everything we can to avoid suffering. Our capacity to handle hardship can be thought of as infant, child, adult, parent, and elder-level maturity. Just as a parent can handle more hardship than their child, so an emotionally mature leader can deal with more than one who is a functional child (emotionally speaking).

### THE FAST-TRACK SYSTEM IN THE BRAIN

There are two systems in the brain that are often oversimplified as “left brain” and “right brain.” The one that is dominant on the left is the **slow-track system**. By using conscious thought, the slow-track system operates more slowly, but it is, of course, what we notice consciously. The slow track is optimized for management. Its primary job is to monitor results and provide explanations and solutions to the problems we face. The slow track gets most of the attention in leadership development.

#### Slow-track System

- Management system
- Slow brain processor (5 Hz)
- Runs at conscious speed
- Left-brain dominant
- Follows master system
  - Manages strategy
  - Solves problems
  - Plans long term
  - Optimizes results

But did you know that there is a system in the brain that operates faster than conscious thought? We call it the **fast-track** or “master” system. People have known for years that there are things happening in the brain we cannot quite catch consciously. While most people have been looking below consciousness for that activity, we are only now discover-

ing there is activity above consciousness. This supra-conscious action does its work faster than we can “keep up” consciously. Its primary job is relational reality. *Who am I in my world* must be clear before I can think about other things. The fast-track system controls how we regulate our emotions, how we remember who we are, who our people are, and how it is like us to act (that is, acting like the self God gave us). In other words, it is our identity center. It controls functions related to:

### Fast-track System

- Master system
- Fast brain processor (6 Hz)
- Supra-conscious speed
- Right-brain dominant
- Maintains identity
  - Individual
  - Group
- Supplies motivation
  - Individual
  - Group
- Optimizes engagement

- Identity
- Motivation
- Emotional control
- Ability to focus
- Relational skills
- Care for others
- Conscience
- Values

The fast track does not listen to the words spoken during classroom study because they move too slowly. Words are work for the slow track. The fast track observes what people are doing. This is why we become aware of people and what they are doing before we start thinking about them. Awareness comes first because awareness is a fast-track activity.

Another example of the difference between slow and fast tracks comes if we compare two everyday tasks—reasoning and face recognition. You are familiar with both experiences from school.

#### REASONING

$$X = (25 - 23)(3^2 + 1) + 5$$

#### FACE RECOGNITION



Notice that with one of these familiar tasks you do NOT start by wondering, *How do I figure this out?* Except for people with brain

damage, we “know” the picture is a face. Your fast track did the work just now so that by the time your slow track was conscious you already “knew” it was a face. The box on the left was sent to your slow track, where discovering that  $X$  equals the number 25 takes much longer. If you tried to teach both tasks to a computer you would soon discover that recognizing a face is actually a much more complex task.

### THE FAST TRACK AND RELATIONSHIPS

We tend to classify things that run faster than consciousness as “automatic.” Nothing happens automatically in living systems. What we call “automatic” consists of learned processes that run faster than the conscious mind so they are finished before we are aware that they were running. Because they happen faster than consciousness we do not consciously remember learning them, but learn them we did!

What do we generally assume will happen “automatically”? Our identity, motivation, emotional control, ability to focus, relationships, care for others, conscience, and values are some of the forces we expect will show up on their own when we wake up. These are the mind’s master processes, and they receive faster processing than conscious thought. We might call this cluster our *identity* or our *emotional or relational competence*.

You can see from the list of functions above that there are quite a few skills that run in the fast track. Since we cannot consciously remember learning these skills we cannot consciously know which skills we learned and which ones we are missing.

As we look around we realize not everyone has the same relational intelligence or ability to handle upsets. We generally assume that others will have the same skills we have. But what did we learn? What are we missing? What skills do the people we lead have? How can we improve emotional intelligence? Leaders have a double task when it comes to the fast-track processes. RARE leaders not only ensure that these seemingly automatic skills run well in themselves but also that these skills develop in their group members. These skills become the core to a group’s identity.

We started this section by saying that nothing happens automatically in living systems, but some things are “wired in” so they are almost automatic. The BIG one is that the slow track is wired to automatically follow the fast track. This means that, if leaders get the fast-track relational part right for themselves and their team, the management thinking follows automatically. We get leadership plus management. We have both front tires on the road and steering the car. Focus on building management systems, and leadership is left to chance. Focus on building leadership systems, and you will always improve management. That is automatic.

### HOW THIS WORKS IN THE BRAIN

Both the fast track and slow track in the brain can develop habits. To be a good leader you require a diversity of good habits in both fast (leadership) and slow (management) systems. Habits live in the white matter of the brain, and what gives them their power is that white matter runs up to 200 times faster than gray matter.

#### *Fast—faster—fastest*

The conscious thought that we have been calling the “slow track” actually operates fairly fast, updating itself with a new state five times every second. Identity processes we have been calling the “fast track” operate even faster, updating six times every second. But this is all gray matter speed. Gray matter is very flexible and can figure out new reality and paths as it goes. However, to keep from getting bogged down, the brain creates “habits” that are prepackaged responses to known situations. Habits take a month or more to grow because the brain has to wrap the habit nerves in white insulation, and that takes some time. Once the habit is properly insulated, that cluster will run up to 200 times faster than gray matter. Habits are the fastest.

When we look at the brain itself we see the outside covered by gray matter doing its flexible best and the inside of the brain cross-connected with white. These fastest connections are present in both the fast-track and slow-track sides of the brain. We have both leader-

ship and management habits for our lives. When things get tough, the one with the most “good habits” wins.

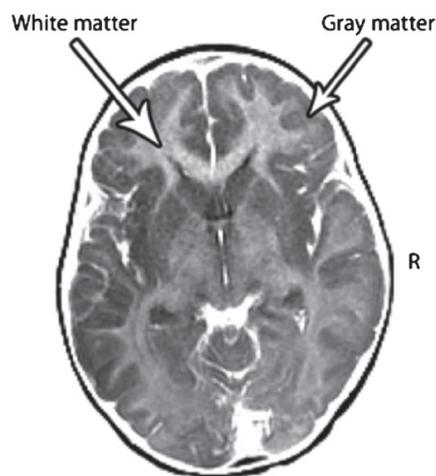
Each habit is a tool or skill. Both the fast and slow tracks develop habits. This book is about developing habits in the fast-track system because that will optimize the slow-track habits as well. The more we practice our skills, the more natural they become until they happen without a conscious deliberation.

Understanding white matter helps us appreciate why habits are so important. They go into operation before our conscious thought engages. People who build fast-track skills into habits operate with greater love, joy, peace, patience, and self-control. Habit qualities seem to happen automatically because they happen faster than we can think about them.

A well-trained fast-track system allows us to return to joy (restore a relationship) quickly from almost any emotion, remain relational during any crisis, and remember how to act like ourselves no matter how we feel. When this system is not well-trained, we will struggle with all of these skills. To compensate, we will be forced to turn to the conscious-thought slow-track system on the left side of the brain.

For example, I (Marcus) recently had a conversation with several pastors who were lamenting how many young people were leaving the church. They zeroed in on how to improve the quality of the ministries designed to attract teens. This management thinking left these leaders stuck in slow-track thinking. As a result, their solutions to the problem of retaining their young adults were all focused on programming. They were tinkering with the problem exclusively from a left-brain-dominant, results-focused, problem-solving perspective.

By looking at the situation from a right-brain-oriented, fast-track perspective, I was able to explain to them that their problem had



MRI cross section of the brain

little to do with programming. The solution was relational. Few of the young people in the church had a relationship with the older folks. Few of the adults, parents, and elders in the church were building relationships with the young people. Consequently, the youth group functioned like an island in the church—disconnected and uninvolved. If you want young people to stay in church, they have to feel like they belong, add value, and feel valued. Which band plays and how relevant your program is have nothing to do with this.

Fast-track skills also influenced how I talked about the problem. I didn't try to shame them and say, "You're all wrong. Here's the real answer!" I didn't get angry or try to scare them by saying, "If you don't do something about this now, it's going to be too late." I started with relational connection. I told them it was clear they cared deeply about their young people and their churches. I also used curiosity as a tool to keep the conversation relational by asking, "I'm curious. Have you looked at this as an issue of community identity and belonging rather than programming?" By the end of the conversation, they all wanted to know more. Our relationships were stronger than when we started.

### **WHY THIS BRAIN SCIENCE IS IMPORTANT FOR LEADERS**

Everyone's master system encounters "road hazards" it cannot manage and "blows a tire" now and then. When people prove hard to lead we tend to start managing them instead of leading them. If our master system shuts down, our mental steering shifts to the management side of the brain and runs at conscious speed. To use our analogy of steering a car, we usually have two tires in front for steering. If one tire goes flat the car will pull very hard to the side. The best solution is to stop and repair the flat tire and not to develop more strategies for driving with one wheel out of commission.

RARE leaders use difficulties as opportunities to focus on improving relational skills before improving task management. When both the leadership and management systems are running well they work well together. Leaders with poorly developed master systems will find

themselves operating almost exclusively out of their brain's slow-track system. Results are predictable and almost inevitable. Here are a few to consider:

### *Mistaking hard work for leadership*

As we've already seen, leaders can confuse working with leading. In fact, most leaders reach their positions because they are really good at getting things done. But perhaps this is part of the problem. Working is about getting a job done and there is certainly some of that in leadership. However, *leading is primarily about guiding the group that does the work.*

### *Focusing on results in ways that damage relationships*

I (Marcus) recently had a moment when I got stuck in slow-track mode and forgot to pay attention to that part of my brain that helps me act like myself. It is a simple story but might help to illustrate what this looks like. I took a short trip to pick up my father-in-law, who has Alzheimer's. He had wandered away from the house and walked nearly a mile to church. It was a Tuesday afternoon but he got disoriented and thought it was Sunday morning. As I was driving to get him, I was completely in the conscious-thought part of my brain. I was busy problem-solving in my mind trying to decide what we were going to do to keep this sort of thing from happening again. I was also focused on the task of picking him up. I felt alone solving my problem.

Because I was focused on how to manage my father-in-law, I neglected the fast-track system in my brain that would remind me of how it is like me to act in a situation like this. As a result, I helped my father-in-law into the car and drove off, never thinking of the pastor who had found my father-in-law and called me to come get him. I realized later (once I got back in touch with the relational part of my brain), that there was a whole community keeping an eye on my father-in-law. The pastor probably had to waste time and energy looking and wondering where my father-in-law had gone now. Had

I had picked him up or had he had wandered off again? Not a huge problem, but still, my focus on managing the problem made me forget to lead the group that was helping me. I later called the pastor, passing it off as my absentminded behavior, and apologized for the inconvenience I must have caused him.

Forgetting our group identity and acting in isolation may seem like a small thing. But small things like this damage relationships. Loss of trust by others happens all the time to leaders who fixate on problem-solving at the cost of relational skills. Leaders often solve problems and get results but frustrate people along the way.

Slow-track thinking can come to define whole organizations. I (Marcus) know several people who worked for one of the largest churches in America. It was a well-organized machine that got amazing results. However, it had a reputation for “chewing up and spitting out” staff members. The driven, type-A culture the organization promoted definitely got results, but it also left a wake of broken relationships.

Burnout is typical of organizations led by results-oriented, problem-solving leaders. These leaders have a well-trained management brain, but often lack a well-trained relational brain. If the master system is untrained or misfiring, the “successful” leader will drive herself and her group toward anxiety, anger, depression, and burnout. In the end, this results-focused leader will produce a structure that is likely to come to a grinding halt or a spectacular crash.

### *Wearing themselves out*

One morning as I (Jim) read Paul’s admonition in Galatians 6:9, “Let us not become weary in doing good,” I thought to myself, “That is easy for you to say! I already feel really tired and it isn’t even afternoon.” I might have added that my work was not as draining as dealing with the workers with whom I shared the tasks. Perhaps, you can relate.

Of course, I was missing the main point of the text. Rather than telling me not to feel tired (which is something even Jesus couldn’t

avoid), *Paul was encouraging me to persist in doing what was good and not allow my weariness with poor results to change my course.* It is easy to grow weary in well doing when I am not seeing results

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**I got more things done than most people I know, but I was exhausted from working like a dog.**

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or when the people are questioning whether the results are worth the effort. At times the discouragement comes from seeing the gap between where I know I should be and the reality of where I am. That morning I was just a tired visionary wondering how long I could sustain the effort and keep others going as well. (Can you relate?)

Hard work and anxiety were wearing me out, but most of it was self-generated—still working while others were home watching TV. I got more things finished than most people I know, but I was exhausted from working like a dog. I was also struggling with a sense of anxiety that was burning up all my excess energy and robbing me of rest.

When I discovered what we call the RARE lifestyle, things began to turn around. In new ways, I was able to keep my motivation strong, fresh, and positive. Learning to maintain my fast-track system changed my life. Discovering and using the highest-grade motivation available not only helped me recover quickly from the weariness that would set in, it helped me guide others to keep a rewarding pace that allowed them to add their creativity and energy to our mission. I have seen the crushing lifestyle that I once lived get the better of some of the most powerful leaders I have known. In fact, far too many leaders and the groups who follow them are drawing their motivation from the wrong power source. As a result, they are running on fumes and wondering how much longer they can go on.

### *Creating a culture of fear*

When problem solving gets all of our focus as an organization, it breeds a level of fear in everything we do. “What will happen if we don’t solve this problem? What will we do if we don’t get these results?”

One of the biggest frauds in the business world in 2015 occurred

at Volkswagen when it was discovered that they had intentionally designed software that made the emissions on their diesel cars appear cleaner than they actually were. This deception grew from a fear culture. Employees and management were afraid to admit they could not meet the extremely high goals set by the corporation's top executives. The corporate culture was such that cheating and lying seemed preferable to looking bad to the boss.<sup>5</sup>

Leaders who lack the RARE skills that characterize a well-trained fast-track system will eventually create malfunctioning groups. The leader's shortcomings impact the entire organization, generating a fear-based culture where people are afraid to admit failure or expose weakness.

### **LESS TIRED, MORE JOYFUL**

Leaders have a double task when it comes to the fast-track processes in that they not only need these automatic skills to run well in themselves but they must be working in their group as well. Great leaders continue improving and diversifying everyone's relational skills. What we notice consciously is how highly motivated, joyful, engaged, and satisfied their group seems to be.

Outstanding leaders almost never know the brain science behind their efforts, but they sense the importance of what they often call "character." Many leaders are guided and motivated by spiritual beliefs and biblical practices. What creates RARE leaders is that they have the skills that go with the beliefs and know how to pass those skills to others.

The RARE leaders we try to emulate use this faster, more powerful engine so they are less tired, less concerned about results, less fatigued, more joyful, more peaceful, and more admired while producing people who are resilient even in hard times. RARE leaders can stay the course without unnecessarily exhausting themselves and others.

Our book is written in two sections. The next few chapters (2–5) will discuss how the process of training the fast track works, reasons it has remained hidden for so long, how the leader's brain works, and

how fast-track leadership develops.

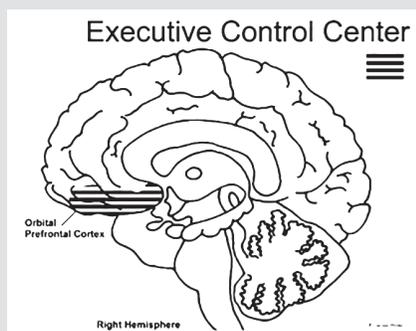
Some readers will want to go directly to the second section (chapters 6–11), where we lead you through the practices that develop the four RARE leadership skills. This chapter may have answered your questions for now, so choose the reading path that works best for you.

In addition, we've included a special Brain Science section at the end of each chapter, diving deeper into some of the physical and theoretical bases of the book. Feel free to skim over these if they're not your thing, but exploring these ideas will give you a more robust understanding of the concepts we're discussing and how you can benefit.

## Brain Science for RARE Leadership

### *The MASTER Fast-Track Processor*

The executive control center is at the very top of our brain but not the top of our head. As the spinal cord grows into our skull pre-birth it goes first to the top, then bends forward to the front of the skull where it turns once



more and ends up just above our eyes and almost where it started. The brain has two sides and the executive control center is on the right side.

Nerve activity enters the brain near the bottom and is “carried” to the top about six times per second in the right brain. Each sweep assembles a “picture” of who and where we are at the moment (provided we are awake). The main focus of this mental picture is answering the question of how to act like myself based on my identity as an individual and “tribe.” Because each sweep is completed in less time than it takes to become conscious (one fifth of a second) we call

this process the “fast track.” The speed of the fast track ensures that we always remember who we are without stopping to figure it out but, at the same time, makes all the fast-track functions “transparent” and “automatic” to conscious thought.

Every time a sweep of the fast track is completed successfully the final picture is assembled in the executive control center at the top known as the prefrontal cortex (PFC). Some VERY important things only happen in the PFC. Here is a partial list of exclusive PFC functions:

- Identity (what do I and my people do under these conditions)
- Personal preferences (what values reflect who I am)
- Creativity
- Judging if an activity was satisfying (did this get me where I wanted to go)
- Goal-directed behavior
- Moral and social behavior
- Correcting our incorrect interpretations of others
- Comparing how I am doing over time
- Calming upsets in myself and others
- Trust (knowing when to trust a face)
- Figuring the least damaging solution
- Predicting a negative outcome
- Moment-by-moment updating of a situation
- How stressed I become (including the level of stress hormones in my body)
- Curiosity
- Feeling appreciation

By checking exclusive functions like curiosity and feeling appreciation we can easily test if the fast track up to the PFC is running well at the moment.

Clearly these skills are all crucial to leadership and full engagement by groups. Without enough training in the

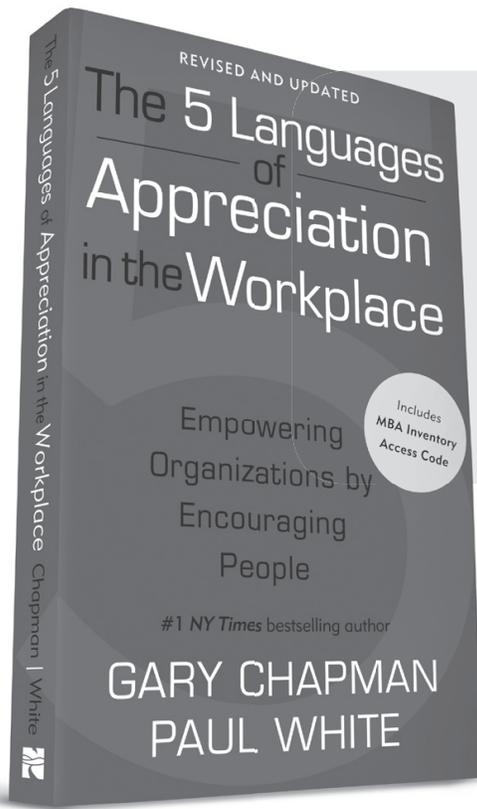
full range of relational skills, the fast track cramps up before it reaches the top. Every time incoming reality fails to reach the PFC the skills in the bullet points shut down. Leadership stops and the rest of the brain careens along. Without executive control by the PFC we resort to rules, problem solving, and avoiding pain. The brain forgets relationships, identity, and the abilities listed above.

Focusing on behavior consistent with our identity is the best way to enlist the highest executive functions of the brain. The skills required to be emotionally mature are taught in the Bible and clarified through brain science. As you continue through this book, you will learn how these skills impact the way we lead and some practical ways to grow your own.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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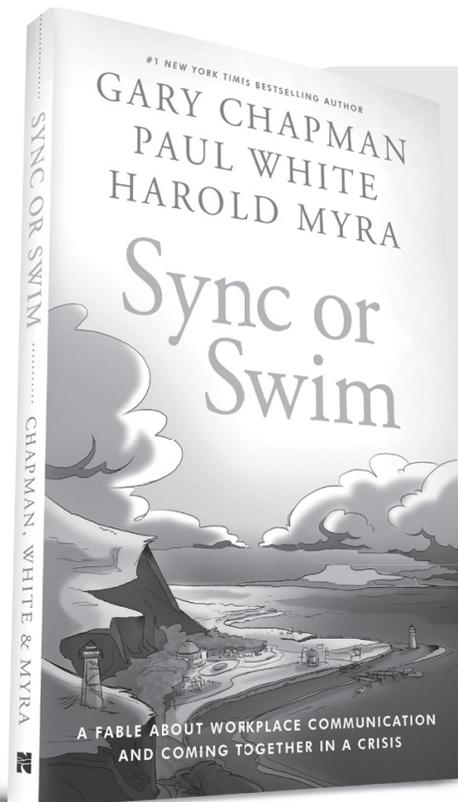
1. Have you ever known a leader who excelled at the RARE habits described in this chapter? How would you describe that person and their impact on the group they led?
2. Would you say that you operate more out of the slow track or the fast track of your brain in your leadership activity? How do you understand the difference?
3. Describe your leadership training/mentoring. Was it primarily focused on slow-track management and problem-solving skills or on fast-track relational skills?
4. Which leader has had the most impact on your development? How would you rate them in the four RARE skills introduced here?



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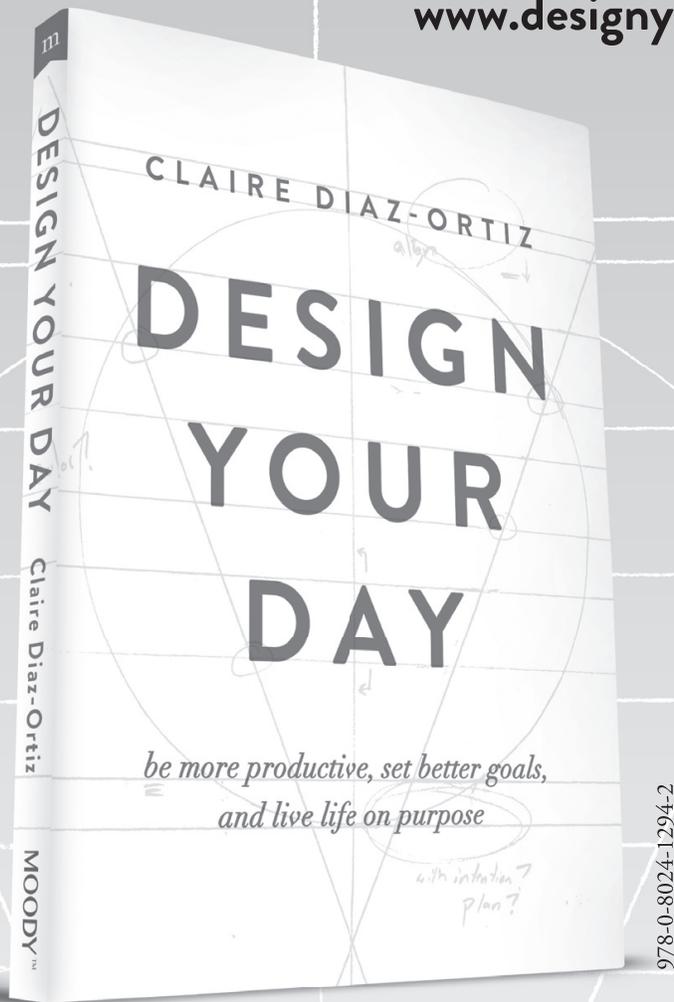
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