



## Foreword

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*VALUES-BASED LEADERSHIP* is a fast-paced, engrossing story of one CEO's dramatic awareness that his company is adrift, rudderless without a foundation of values to guide consistent behavior. The opening scene that shakes fear into the soul of Robb Reinhart is repeated all too often in real life by executives unaware they are on the precipice of impending disaster.

This engaging book reads like a fast-paced novel with twists and turns that dramatize practical yet profound principles and processes of leadership. The author's experiences and skills as a consultant and executive mentor are undoubtedly reflected in one of the book's main characters, "Coach," who becomes the alter ego to the story's lead protagonist.

Robb Reinhart literally receives his wake-up call

through a dream premonition of a board meeting that puts him on edge. But it is his wife's questioning that causes him to examine the underlying dynamics of a potential crisis. It is then he discovers that everyone in his company, including the chairman of the board, has sensed the signs of organizational disorder. Robb's preoccupation with performance metrics has blinded him to a variety of subtle clues that indicate his key people are diverging from *his* norms—*his* fundamental values—on which he thought the company was based.

Shaken to problem-solve in ways that depart from his usual business practices, Robb reengages his executive team by probing and reinterpreting employee survey data previously ignored. As he and his vice presidents drill down through the layers of management, a disturbing picture emerges: the organization is out of sync with the best practices it once enjoyed.

This story provides an artful interplay between an executive's philosophical point of view and his need to involve his team members in a progression of implementation actions. But the saga is not just focused on achieving improved business results. The events of the story also require the reader to consider the personal challenges of leaders as human beings with self-doubts and anxieties. One must also consider the teacher's role as mentor and confidant to team members, who at times may face deeply troubling personal or family crises. It

keeps us mindful that, as leaders, we serve multiple audiences, any one of which may take center stage and demand attention.

Author Ken Majer is a compelling storyteller with a mission, but one who sustains the intrigue and flow of the story without rushing or forcing the leadership principles from which all of us can learn. Throughout, he guides the reader into critical thinking as Robb and Coach periodically engage in probing question-and-answer sessions.

The reader who reflects thoughtfully on this portfolio of lessons will be better prepared to respond to leadership challenges. Using the principles in *Values-Based Leadership* will go a long way toward helping meet these challenges in our increasingly complex and changing business world.



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*Fear at first—then wide awake.  
Is this my life I have at stake?*



“YOU’RE FIRED.” The words hit Robb like an unexpected punch in the stomach. He felt faint, kind of giddy, and a little woozy—off balance.

The chairman’s message was a shock. Robb Reinhart had been CEO of Central Plains Foods, a major Midwestern food distribution company, for three years after logging almost four years as the senior vice president of marketing followed by five years as the company’s chief operating officer. While there had been some setbacks recently, this was completely unexpected. He was stunned.

Robb had come to the board of directors’ meeting with the same confidence and nonchalance that he characteristically had: *No big deal. We’ll talk the numbers, review the go-forward strategy, endure some of the self-importance of one or two of the directors, and adjourn the meeting. Then I’ll go back to work at my real job—running the company.*

It was true that the company's business over the past two quarters was slower than usual, but the numbers weren't all that bad considering the economy, a world jittery with the reality of terrorism, and the aftermath of 9/11 still palpable. After all, people had to eat, and Central Plains Foods distributed produce to most of the major supermarket chains as well as the independent grocery stores in the eight-state Midwest region.

What should have alerted Robb to the impending doomsday message from Chairman Dr. Neil Anderson were the comments he made leading up to Robb's abrupt dismissal.

"My biggest concern is not the drop in revenues as you might suspect . . . it's the disintegration of our culture . . . the indifference of our employees . . . a malaise that is destroying the spirit of our team . . . and a callousness toward our suppliers. These are the failures of leadership that will doom any great company, and we must have a change at the top to avoid such a fate!"

*Disintegrating culture, indifference, malaise, callousness. What in the world is he talking about?*

As the chairman droned on with his accusations, Robb's vision tunneled and Anderson's body seemed to loom larger and larger at the end of the table. At the same time, his bellowing voice increased in intensity, filling the room and making it close and stuffy. He felt as though he were in a Kafka movie as Mary Meyers, vice president of

Human Resources, handed Robb the resignation papers to sign. The pen in his hand seemed heavy and slippery. The room felt hot, but Robb was chilled and damp.

