

“A genuinely new view of leadership — practical and profound.”

— Jack Canfield

# HOST

~~ROLES~~  
SIX NEW RULES  
OF ENGAGEMENT

FOR TEAMS, ORGANIZATIONS,  
COMMUNITIES, MOVEMENTS

MARK McKERGOW Ph.D. & HELEN BAILEY

*“A genuinely new view of leadership – practical and profound.” – Jack Canfield*

*“**Host** brings together many practical leadership strategies to draw people together – effective both in the Board room and on Mount Everest.”*

Sir Chris Bonington, mountaineer and author

*“Being a great host helps you to be a great networker. This practical book will help you build relationships and engagement both inside and outside your organization.”*

Dr Ivan Misner, founder, BNI

*“A great mix of research, philosophy, stories and insight into what real leadership is about.”*

Mike Brent, Ashridge Business School

*“Having been a host and leader for nearly 40 years, the insights in **Host** were as refreshingly relevant to me as they will be for any young manager, be they in hospitality or anywhere else where results through others are needed. These easy-to-apply principles will last you a lifetime.”*

Philip Newman-Hall, Director/General Manager, Le Manoir aux Quat’Saisons

*“Mark and Helen have brought together a range of ideas and stories from across history and the globe into a superbly written and practical primer for today’s leaders. The idea of the leader as host may not be a new metaphor but they have set out the many varied and powerful ways that the host/leader can act to bring together people and performance. Key to this is the need for flexibility as exemplified in the stepping forward or stepping back positions and resolving the many paradoxes of leadership. The six roles that the host/leader needs to adopt also add richness to their analysis. But above all it is in the many stories that the reader can truly understand the everyday issues that leaders face and how acting as a host can help them lead effectively. The authors have a down to earth style and convey their ideas with warmth and humour. This is a great addition to the world of leadership ideas and thoroughly recommended regardless of whether you are a CEO or leading a team of one – yourself!”*

Ralph Lewis, Chair Greenleaf Centre for Servant-Leadership (UK)

*“The book brings a truly international perspective with examples from all over the world. Very few books can connect with people from all corners of the globe: anywhere there are people there can be good hosts building great engagement and connection. In a list of absolute must-read books on leadership, this book should be at the top.”*

Verónica de Andrés, International speaker and best-selling author, creator of the concept CONFIANZA TOTAL

*“**Host** creatively invites the reader to reflect on optimistic, positive and effective methods of leadership. The development of respectful relationships, a sense of individual and team belonging and notions of strategically stepping forward and stepping back are crucial ingredients in building and leading effective teams. In their book, Mark McKergow and Helen Bailey offer inspiring and effective insights and strategies to build meaningful teams. **Host** provides practical and effective concepts to enhance leadership styles, particularly relevant to modern education and health settings.”*

Jill Pearman, MindMatters, Principals Australia Institute

*“This is a book for which many of us have been waiting: a compelling and original revoicing of the ancient practice of leadership as hospitable movement. In times of dangerous territorial claims, it teaches us that the gift of leadership for the world is that of safe space. Such words could scarcely be more timely.”*

Dr Simon P Walker, author, The Undefended Leader

*“Mark McKergow and Helen Bailey have boldly stepped into the daunting gap between Heroic Leadership and Servant Leadership. In doing so, they have constructed a sturdy bridge of essential distinctions for the modern leader in today’s challenging world. Their clear articulation of leader as host provides a rich set of skills to strengthen anyone ready to play a leadership role. You will gain beneficial new perspectives on engagement, decision making, and organizational effectiveness. You can apply the guidance offered here whenever you have a reason to work with others.”*

Paul R Scheele, PhD in Leadership & Change, CEO of Scheele Learning Systems

*“This fascinating book uses the metaphor of ‘hosting’ to unravel the complexities of leading and building relationships in organisations and communities. **Host** opens a treasure trove of thoughts, actions, mental maps and advice, all richly illustrated with stories old and new.”*

Professor John Purcell, Bath University

*“Given our modern world with all its problems and all its possibilities isn’t it time we re-examined the role of leadership to discover a more useful, natural and easily compelling model? This book says ‘yes!’ and gives you the insights and tools to do it. The leader as host unleashes powerful new forces for effective goodness that are available naturally to each of us. Buy this book, read this book, you and the world will be glad you did.”*

Martin Rutte, President of Livelihood & Founder  
[www.projectheavenonearth.com](http://www.projectheavenonearth.com)

*“Mark and Helen’s book on host leadership provides a fresh new perspective on the need for more and better leadership in organizations. Leadership is no longer a hierarchical notion. It is a requirement among most of the organization. A leader who exhibits the qualities and practices of the leader as host will be setting an example for all those who seek a role model for growing both themselves and the organization.”*

Alan Kay, author of Fry The Monkeys

*“In an already crowded field do we need another book about ‘leadership’? Well, yes we do when it is a book like **Host** that seeks to apply leadership thinking to the complex, volatile and ambiguous world in which leaders now operate. Mark McKergow and Helen Bailey have elegantly and practically distilled key concepts about leadership so that they are readily accessible and eminently practical. Fresh, innovative and immediately useable.”*

John Campbell, Managing Director, Growth Coaching International Pty Ltd

*“Leadership and hospitality are about relationships, not transactions. This book brings together a wealth of perspectives, and will energise and refresh anyone looking to build engagement and results in their organisation.”*

Harry Murray MBE, Chairman, Lucknam Park Hotel & Spa

*"I find the concept of leader as host presented in this book to be a very practical and balanced way to think about leadership. **Host** is very helpful in breaking down daunting situations into manageable parts, which then reveals constructive next steps. Indeed, there were a couple of times while reading it where I stopped to perform a small step or send an invitation inspired by the insight gained from the book."*

Daniel McCoy, Pixar

*"Increasingly modern life leaves people feeling disconnected and distant. When you use the lessons in **Host** to be the most warm, gracious, and effective host your board, team, or clients have ever experienced, the effect will be all the more powerful."*

Paul Wicks PhD, TED Fellow and VP of Innovation, PatientsLikeMe

*"Leaders of communities and movements, and also of businesses and organisations, have to know when to switch between serving their guests and when to invite them along a new and exciting path. The leader as host is the perfect metaphor for this balancing act, and **Host** is the perfect practical guide on how to do it."*

Sanderson Jones, co-founder, Sunday Assembly

*"I have followed Mark's work for several years and often reference it during Art of Hosting Conversations that Matter workshops. His metaphor of the leader as host strongly resonates with participants. For those that are practising or developing their relational leadership skills, this book will be a valuable resource for those who are in a host as leader journey."*

Jerry Nagel, President, Meadowlark Institute and Art of Hosting Steward

*"Incorporating the ideas in this book into my life and leadership has been a deeply satisfying experience. Whether you're hosting gatherings to make your organization more profitable, productive, or innovative, you'll find practical help in this excellent book offered by a couple of first rate minds. Highly recommended!"*

Stewart Emery, international best selling co-author of Success Built to Last and Do You Matter?

*"Today's world requires a new concept of leadership; one that learns, one that has the gesture of generosity at the level of impulse. Here is the territory, forget the old maps."*

Nora Bateson, filmmaker, author, president International Bateson Institute

# ***Host***

Six new ROLES of engagement for teams,  
organisations, communities and movements

**Mark McKergow and Helen Bailey**

First published in Great Britain in 2014 by  
SolutionsBooks  
15 St Georges Avenue  
London  
N7 0HB  
United Kingdom  
[www.solutionsbooks.com](http://www.solutionsbooks.com)

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Rights enquiries should be addressed to: Solutions Books  
via [info@sfwork.com](mailto:info@sfwork.com) or by post to the address above

ISBN 978-0-9549749-8-5

Cover design by  
Cathi Stevenson  
Author photography by  
John Cassidy  
Design, typesetting and production by  
Action Publishing Technology Ltd, Gloucester

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# Foreword

By Stephen Josephs, Co-Author of *Leadership Agility*

Has this ever happened to you? It's the end of a day and you're contemplating the problems that demand your attention – fires in operations, unpleasant surprises in a key customer account, complications in relations with your board, a troubling employee survey, and long-term strategic plans that are perpetually on hold. And then it hits you like a bolt of lightning. You push back from your chair and say aloud, “What we need around here is a better metaphor!”

Okay, the last part of the scenario is unlikely—but here's something I can almost guarantee: by the time you are midway through this book, you will have excellent new ideas about how to mobilize the collective intelligence of your teams. And because of how you'll encourage those solutions to arise, your culture will automatically shift towards operating in a more solution-focused, proactive way.

*Host* invites us to try on a new metaphor for leadership, one that has far-reaching, practical benefits. This unique lens will dramatically add richness and effectiveness to how you execute your role as leader. For many of you, however, that promise may seem only remotely plausible – and with good reason. It begs the question *how could a metaphor, an idea, have that kind of power?*

Without necessarily knowing it, it's likely you already have examples of how metaphors powerfully operate in executives you know. Consider the leader who believes business is war. He thinks of himself as a general and turns to the business of commanding the troops in battle. He will prize *The Art of War* as a business book, just the way *The Prince* by Machiavelli might guide the boardroom maneuvers of those who believe business is a Game of Thrones.

Metaphors not only define our identity; they tell us what's valuable, what's feasible, and what to do next. They exist as mental models, often unexamined and unchallenged by those who live by them. The two metaphors above carry unwanted consequences. What's it like to work for The Commander or Machiavelli? Somewhere in our careers, many of us have learned this firsthand.

McKergow and Bailey call our attention to another metaphor deeply embedded in our business culture: *leader as hero*. Despite leadership-development experts' advice to the contrary, many leaders still operate as though they are the heroes in the unfolding story of their personal and organizational journey.

The authors describe the limitations of that model and how it negatively affects a team's engagement and free flow of ideas. Heroic leaders are also prone to self-importance. Unless it's part of your brand identity (think Miss Piggy and Donald Trump), self-importance is bad for business and for the health of your organization. Yet the hero metaphor survives. We actually *do* need a better metaphor.

Enter Host Leadership. From the C-Suite to small teams, when leaders explore *Host*, they will approach their leadership in a new way, as if they were hosts of a gathering dedicated to achieving benefits for the organization and all its stakeholders. Hosting such a gathering requires that they know and communicate its purpose and direction to its key players. Then the ongoing question becomes how to create the most supportive environment for collective innovation and enthusiasm to arise from the group.

As you read about the six roles of engagement, you will see the authors have given a great deal of thought to how our experience as hosts and guests transfers to leadership challenges. Because they write with such precision about the topic, this slender volume is built for speed. McKergow and Bailey know you're interested in applying concepts as quickly as possible. Indeed, they hit the sweet spot of just enough specificity to guide and inspire.

Albert Einstein said, "Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler." A former physicist himself, McKergow's fondness for simplicity shows up in the elegance of his seminar designs. Participants go from contemplating intriguing ideas to applying and testing them in their specific leadership challenges at work. Similarly, the authors encourage you to work your way through *Host* with a project in mind. That way you can quickly put your ideas to the test.

Helen Bailey complements McKergow's theoretical brilliance with her deep experience in putting these concepts to the test in difficult business situations. Before she dedicated herself to helping businesses achieve their goals through coaching, she was a senior service-quality manager at a leading bank. She has experience in organizations of all sizes, and the illustrations of *Host Leadership* put into action come largely through her firsthand knowledge of putting them to the test.

McKergow and Bailey have written *Host* with the assumption you want to bring out people's best work, channel your organization's collective intelligence, and deepen your capacity for wise leadership. Furthermore, they believe you want a way to develop your approach to leadership, one that feels like a natural extension of your experience and values. And, because you are busy, you want this wisdom delivered simply, succinctly and memorably in a readable book.

I believe the authors have delivered that book. Now that it's in your hands, you're on the threshold of generating practical ideas you can put into immediate action. I recommend that, after you've taken your ideas for a test drive, you read the book again. You'll get a second infusion of depth and creativity.

Through the authors' website, you'll be able to share your ideas and get the benefit of others' experience. This platform provides you with access to a community of practice with McKergow and Bailey as your masterful and dedicated hosts.

Enjoy!

Stephen Josephs, Ed.D.

Co-Author of *Leadership Agility: Five Levels of Mastery for Anticipating Change*

Author of *Dragons at Work*

Novato, CA

Part One

# **A New Look at Leadership**





# 1

## Time for a New Look at Leadership

*"The host is both the first and the last"*

~Old Arabic proverb

A host is someone who receives or entertains guests. This is a position with which we are all familiar, at some level. Think about your experience of hosting people in your home or at a celebration. Hosts sometimes have to act heroically – stepping forward, planning, inviting, introducing, providing. They also act in service: stepping back, encouraging, giving space, joining in. The good host can be seen moving effortlessly between them. Hosting has ancient roots and is found across all cultures. We all know good hosting (and good “guesting”) at an instinctive gut level.

This book explores the metaphor of host as leader, and leader as host. This timely yet timeless idea is both practical and transformational. It is practical in that the skills, tools and ideas in this book can help us build engagement with people – with individuals and teams at group level, at organizational level (including both corporate and public bodies), and at the wider levels of communities and movements. And it is transformational because, simply by thinking about the leader as a host, we have already opened the door to a rich and wonderful world of awareness, flexibility and history.

We will be looking closely at how modern leaders are already using hosting ideas in practice – sometimes without even knowing it. Former president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, may have been the most celebrated leader of the second half of the twentieth century. As we will see, he used hosting strategies in many smart ways. We will be looking at examples from him and others, including TED curator Chris Anderson, Everest mountaineer Sir Chris Bonington, and corporate executives, managers and business owners. We have also been exploring what leaders can learn from some of the world’s leading hosts, and how hosting customs are inbuilt as part of the world’s cultural and spiritual traditions.

The book will help you to:

- Generate engagement and participation to move your organization forward
- Build productive relationships and connections in support of a purposeful endeavor
- Enhance your ability to get results by supporting others
- Increase your awareness of times to act decisively and times to let go

Hosting has always mattered. We think it is time to take a new look at what it means to today's leaders.

## **What does it mean to lead?**

The art of leading was never easy – and it seems to be getting harder all the time. Communication is faster, connection is greater, markets are global, and whatever action we take is part of a great onrushing whirl of conversation and innovation.

In this world, what does it mean to *lead*? People can get all the information they need (apparently from whatever perspective they want) at the touch of a button. They can interact with whomever they want. So, the classical view of a leader as someone who simply issues information and direction is obsolete.

This book offers an alternative. *Leadership* seems to put the focus on the leader. We think this is a mistake. Leading is about a relationship – between the leader and the others. The word *followers* is not a great term for those people, and we will be examining some alternative relationship definitions shortly. It takes two to have a relationship – but the leader is only one person. So this book is about building relationships – at work, in the community, in society, at home – to engage others. This engagement is the key ingredient that leads to increased performance and results.

## Leadership as engagement

Some relationships are simply transactional; popping into a convenience store to buy a chocolate bar, for example, usually consists simply of an exchange of one thing for another – chocolate for money. Engagement isn't a big part of this; the fact that both people are there and awake is enough.

In the old days of mass production, everyone had something to do, and as long as they did it, all would be fine; the system would fit together and products would emerge. These kinds of workplaces involved taking engagement out of the equation: one person could easily be replaced by another, and so engagement didn't really matter.

As the twentieth century wore on, it became increasingly clear that engagement was what really counted. If people are engaged – aware, committed, involved, taking action, participating in an ever-changing landscape – they both get more and give more. There is plenty of reliable research on this; the famous “black box” studies led by Professor John Purcell of the University of Bath are a good example.<sup>1</sup> Purcell and his colleagues spent over six years looking at UK companies renowned for their employees' high performance.

Purcell's group found that *even* in organizations with excellent HR policies and practices, and an attractive “big idea” mission that drew people in, the main difference in performance actually came from the relationship between line managers and staff. This was the “black box” that made the difference. Engagement is the key element – without it, everything else is at risk.

Matters are even more stark when organizations and communities are facing *wicked problems* – the boundaries of the problem are uncertain, there are wide-ranging links and connections, and the relationship between cause and effect is not clear: does the chicken or the egg come first? Many of the issues facing organizations and society are becoming increasingly *wicked* – the war on drugs, climate change, developing new business models, global poverty, the banking system, the economy. These are questions which don't easily fit into a single department and have no clear stopping point – a time when it will be all done and dusted.

In such situations, a simple analysis will not yield lasting progress. Engagement is key – getting people together to work on the issues becomes the first priority, rather than expecting an instant answer. British leadership researcher Keith Grint sums it up:

*“Wicked problems require a transfer of authority from the individual to the collective because only collective engagement can hope to address the problem. The uncertainty involved in wicked problems implies that leadership, as I am defining it, is not a science but an art – the art of engaging a community in facing up to complex collective problems.”*<sup>2</sup>

The fact that the world, and consequently the challenges of leadership, is becoming more unpredictable is not in doubt. In the years after 9/11, even the US Army War College, noted for a conservative and hierarchical approach, began to focus on a VUCA future – Volatile, Unpredictable, Complex and Ambiguous.<sup>3</sup> A VUCA world demands agility of response, flexibility to utilize emerging situations, and a mix of clarity (about where we are trying to go) and flexibility in how we get there.

## Paradoxes and dilemmas for the modern leader

Leadership has probably always been a paradoxical business. It certainly isn't simple in terms of ascertaining which rules to follow in order to guarantee success. A recent collection of leadership literature<sup>4</sup> came up with the following paradoxes with which leaders have to contend:

- Being wanted and yet also being resisted by their organizations
- Needing to be both *here* as part of the organization and *elsewhere* – apart and somehow separate or different
- Being a member of their group and yet also behaving differently at times – with the consent of the group
- Delivering results, often rapidly, while keeping an eye on long-term developments
- Acting now as well as continuing to follow a journey of development

Work at Ashridge Business School<sup>5</sup> has shown – as if we needed reminding – that leadership is no simple business. Rather than having a straightforward list of behaviors to adopt, leaders are now facing a series of dilemmas – mutually conflicting requirements:

	<b>Direction</b>	
Imagining a better future	<i>while</i>	keeping focused
	<b>Timing</b>	
Waiting and seeing	<i>while</i>	accelerating progress
	<b>Relationships</b>	
Maintaining distance and breadth	<i>while</i>	getting close
	<b>Loyalties</b>	
Putting your own needs first	<i>while</i>	serving the organization
	<b>Control</b>	
Letting go	<i>while</i>	keeping control
	<b>Self-Belief</b>	
Showing vulnerability	<i>while</i>	being strong
	<b>Understanding</b>	
Enquiring	<i>while</i>	knowing

This is enough to make anyone's head spin. How on earth are we supposed to do all of this? It feels as if we are being pulled in two opposite directions.

The question is not *which to do* but *when to do each*. This means developing a sense of timing and context – of when to act and when not to act.

Each of the dilemmas listed above comes down in the end to stepping forward or stepping back. Take the first one, for example – direction: keeping focused means stepping forward and ensuring that nothing distracts from the next steps. Imagining a better future, on the other hand, is an activity which requires taking a step back, disengaging from the pressures of everyday work and allowing the imagination to build and create. Similarly, accelerating progress usually means getting in there and exerting pressure, while waiting and seeing is about stepping back and picking the right moment to accelerate, and so on.

## Stepping forward and stepping back

In this book, we will be looking in practical detail at the way hosts work, and how this can help us as leaders at all levels to start acting right away in ways that will increase engagement, build performance and bring results. And the very first lesson is that the key question for a host at every moment is:

*As a leader, are you going to step forward, or step back?*

You're probably thinking that the answer is obvious – leaders step forward! Yes, of course they do – sometimes. The idea of such heroic leadership qualities is thousands of years old. Surely leaders go first, need to be brave, need to build confidence in taking people into the unknown and uncertain future.



We've been looking at how leadership is developing in the twenty-first century, and we are noticing a growing idea that leaders also step *back* sometimes. This needs a different mindset, changing the way we think about the role of the leader from the hero to the engager. There are many reasons for this shift – not least the pace of change, the growth in interconnection and moves towards a knowledge economy, where putting ideas into practice is more important than doing up the same bolt on a machine for thirty years. Modern leaders need to engage others, to encourage them to step forward and act – otherwise, the leader can end up pulling everyone else along, trying to have all the answers and exhausting him/herself in the process.

For some people, stepping back is quite a new idea. We find other leaders who are keen to step back – though they may try it and then struggle with what to do next. Many can't resist the temptation to revert to action and trying to do everything once again.

This idea is not totally new, of course. Bill Walsh was coach of the San Francisco 49ers NFL football team for many years. Bob Johansen interviewed Walsh as part of his VUCA leadership research:

*“His biggest challenge as a leader was deciding when to push and when to pull back. So he said he would consciously assess the mood of his organization, and if people were too comfortable, he would create a sense of tension and a sense of urgency. If they were too uptight, he would calm them and pull them back. So that’s the kind of delicacy of speed. It’s not just running fast all the time. Those that run fast all the time will wear out.”<sup>6</sup>*

So, stepping back can be good. How would it be if you knew *when* to step back, to invite action and contribution from others, and when to step forward again to nudge, move on or even change direction completely – on a moment-by-moment basis? Wow – that sounds like a *big skill set*, as one of our coaching guru friends put it. Yes, it is – however, the great part is this:

*You already know how to do it!*

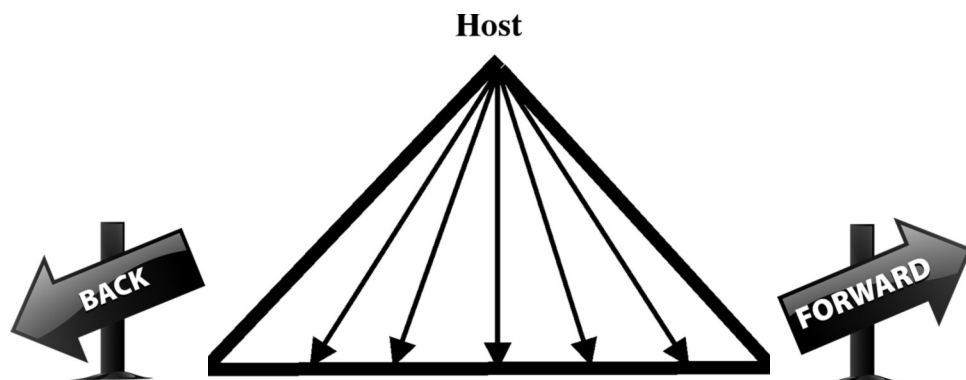
At least in some ways, you already have some awareness and ability from your experience of hosting – whatever that might be – to know when and how to step forward and to step back. In this book, we will share with you the frameworks and ideas that will enable you to develop your skill to an exquisite level of awareness, with many options that you can deploy smoothly at a moment’s notice. By learning about and starting to use the six roles and four positions described in this book, you will be building on, tuning and mastering your ability to work with the concept of the leader as a *HOST*.

## **The leader as host**

This is a powerful idea. We all, at some level, know what a host does. We have all invited people around for a meal or a party. We have all been through the balance of preparation and engagement, the joy of introducing people to new friends, the balance of leading, organizing and participating. And we have all been guests too, experiencing the skill of a good host (and perhaps the clumsiness of a bad one) firsthand.

Hosts don’t just engage people by drawing them in. They introduce people to each other, make connections and act positively to bring together synergistic groups – people who can complement and add to each other’s qualities, skills and interests. The art of arranging – whom to put with whom, what might make an interesting group, even thinking about keeping specific participants apart – is a key element of the host’s skill.

Having drawn people together, a good host won't dominate the situation. He/she will flit from one section to another, with a word here and a touch there, keeping an all-encompassing eye on how things are going. But the host won't hog the limelight or become tiresome by constantly taking center stage. The host is always on the lookout for when to intervene and when to leave things ticking along – when to step forward and when to step back. The role of the host transcends and includes both. It entails awareness and timing – and acting instantly.



Many people around the world have commented to us that, while the notion of being a *leader* seems like a very big stretch for them, thinking of themselves as a *host* is much easier. This gives us a way in to what can be a very sophisticated and flexible leadership position. Mark first published his view on the dance of the host as leader as long ago as 2009.<sup>7</sup>

We are not alone in being fascinated by the possibilities of leading as hosting. The excellent Art of Hosting movement ([www.artofhosting.org](http://www.artofhosting.org)) demonstrates ways to build participation in leadership by hosting large-scale conversations that matter. In Sweden, Jan Gunnarsson has been introducing people to Hostmanship as welcoming leadership.<sup>8</sup> Margaret Wheatley and colleagues at the Berkana Institute have been using the contrast between hero and host for some time, mainly in a servant-leadership context.<sup>9</sup>

In this book, we seek for the first time to take a deep and detailed look at the role of the host: to show how hosting can inform all kinds of everyday moves – big and small – and how acting as a host is a marvelous way to build engagement, relationship and action. We will look at the roots of hospitality, at the



different ways it is played out around the world, and take a deep look at what it is to host, and to lead.

## The Disraeli Effect

For a first look at what good hosts do, let us turn to leadership guru Warren Bennis, who recounts a story about William Gladstone and Benjamin Disraeli, the famous nineteenth-century British prime ministers:

*“If you had dinner with William Gladstone, you were left thinking, ‘Gladstone is the wittiest, the most intelligent, the most charming person around.’ But when you had dinner with Benjamin Disraeli, you were left thinking, ‘I’m the wittiest, the most intelligent, the most charming person around!’ Gladstone shone but Disraeli created an environment where others could shine. The latter is the more powerful form of leadership, an adventure in which the leader is privileged to find treasure within others and put it to good use.”*<sup>10</sup>

Disraeli was clearly the better host. We call this ability to help people see themselves in new and more resourceful ways *the Disraeli effect*. You will find many different ways to engage the Disraeli effect through the coming chapters.

## From rules to roles

The term *rules of engagement* is a familiar one to those who have an interest in military history and operations. As well as being the title of a popular US sitcom, rules of engagement are given to troops operating in conflict zones. These rules stipulate precisely under which circumstances force may be used, and to what level. These rules, like all rules, are designed to be followed closely – troops who breach them by using too much force will be in very serious trouble with their own commanders and will bring their operations into disrepute. These rules of engagement are of course about military engagement with the enemy.

Here we are looking at engagement of a different kind – the engagement that draws people in to tackle complex problems, combine their energies and create new futures. In a world in which leaders face constant change and unresolvable dilemmas, hard rules are not going to do the job. Complex and shifting situations require flexible and contextual responses. It’s not just about *what to do*; it’s *when to do it and when not to do it*.

We are moving the notion of leadership and engagement from an approach that involves *rules* to one that involves *roles*. A role is something you do – at the appropriate time. In the terms of this book, roles are ways of acting and behaving in a social situation. A role is something we slip into and out of all the time – like parent, friend, badminton player. It's nothing to do with acting (like a stage performer). Here, it is about changing our awareness and focus, from day to day, hour to hour, even moment to moment. Now, here's the thing: as a host, we already know how to take on different roles at different times, how to shift from one role to another. We even know when to make the shifts, when to step forward and when to step back again.

The notion of *six roles of a Host Leader* enables us to rapidly build awareness of a wide range of possibilities for action. We can also tap into our inherent knowledge of the dance of the host – forward and back – in each role.

### **But I'm not a host! What can I do?**

The wonderful thing about metaphors is that they can inform our behavior in whatever situation we find ourselves, rather than constraining us into certain contexts. People often say to us, "I inherited my team when I took over the job! How can I be a Host Leader?"

We don't have to be in a hosting position to let hosting inform what we do – to act like a host, and thereby transform relationships around us. Even if the team members were there to begin with, we can start to think of ourselves as the host and the others as guests – and see what happens.

One startling example of this comes from one of the great leaders of the twentieth century, Nelson Mandela. As you probably know, Mandela was an activist for democracy in South Africa, was imprisoned for life by the apartheid regime for treason (for agitating against the state), worked tirelessly from his prison cell to keep the cause alive, was released after twenty-seven years and went on to be the first black president of a new democratic "rainbow nation" in South Africa.

Shortly after he was imprisoned on the feared Robben Island off the coast of Cape Town, Mandela was visited by his (white) lawyer George Bizos. Even under conditions of extreme subjugation, Mandela was able to act like a host. Bizos recalls the meeting:

*“On my first visit, in the middle of winter, he was brought to the consulting room where I was waiting. There were eight warders with him, two in front, two at the back, two on each side. Prisoners do not usually set the pace at which they move with their warders. But it was quite obvious that he was – from the open van that they came [in], right up to the little verandah of the consulting rooms. And I stepped down, past the two in front, and embraced him, said, ‘Hello.’ He returned the greeting [and] immediately asked, ‘How’s Zami?’ which is, how are the children? And he then pulled himself back, and said, ‘George, I’m sorry, I have not introduced you to my guard of honor.’ And then proceeded to introduce each one of the warders by name. Now, the warders were absolutely amazed. I think that this was the first time that they saw a white man and particularly a lawyer, I suppose, coming and embracing a black man, but they were absolutely stunned, and they actually behaved like a guard of honor. They respectfully shook my hand.”<sup>11</sup>*

Mandela was able to take the lead, even when he was the prisoner surrounded by eight guards. This is the power of the host-guest relationship – it is very deeply ingrained, and we are all so used to it that often we don’t notice it happening but simply play our parts. Host Leadership is a way to take a leading position, in a way that draws others in, in a natural way. The details of how you do it will depend on your own culture, your own contexts and your own preferences.

## **Getting the most out of this book**

You will get more from reading this book if you relate it to a real setting. “Host as Leader” is a metaphor, a parallel between two things. By thinking about what we already know about hosting, and what we can learn from excellent hosts around the world, we then view leadership in a new light. This new light will provide a fresh perspective from which we can take action – usually right away – to tackle situations differently and make progress.

The metaphor – described in this book – is the first part of the story. The second part is your own experience. This book is a jumping-off point for expanding and building on that experience. We have done a lot of the work in putting this material together, and we now want you to help us finish your particular copy by connecting the ideas and stories here with your own situation and knowledge.

Some of the ideas in the book will jump right out at you. These may well be the innovations you need right now. Other stories may not quite connect yet. That's fine – perhaps you are already using that strategy, or it may be that you are not yet in a position to use that particular piece. Just move along and discover what else you can enjoy and take inspiration from.

You will find some big ideas here. We often connect them with very everyday examples of small things which can make big differences. These small things are very everyday and mundane, and you may well be tempted to pass them over in search of bigger and bolder strategies. Don't do that – there is a remarkable power in the simple words, the tiny details that bring things to life.

We have added some Reflective Questions at key stages of the book, to help you make your own connections and learning points. It is worth taking a few moments to pause and jot down some initial answers right now. As your role and situation develop, so will your reflections, ideas and actions.

## **Reflective questions**

So, please take a couple of minutes to reflect on these questions, in order to position yourself for a highly productive experience.

- What are the biggest leadership challenges facing you right now?
- What would be the benefits for you of finding new ways to engage people and building increased performance?
- What are the advantages of thinking in terms of flexible roles rather than hard-and-fast rules?
- What was the first thing you liked about the host perspective when you heard about it? What struck you as potentially powerful and useful?

## Key points

- Leadership in the twenty-first century is about relationships rather than transactions.
- Leaders engage people around wicked problems, fast-emerging change and volatile worlds.
- Leaders – and hosts – know when to step forward and back.
- Host Leadership is about roles, not rules – roles that we take on for a while, rather than rules we always follow.
- Anyone can think like a host – even when the situation looks very unpromising.

*Did you know you can get free bonus resources on Host Leadership from [www.hostleadership.com](http://www.hostleadership.com)? Use the code you'll find at the end of the last chapter to sign in.*

# The time has come for a new yet ancient look at leadership

**Great engagement is the key to truly successful leadership, and the secret to moving forward is knowing when to step back . . .**

It is no longer about being the hero, the one who makes everything happen. There is another way: be the host. This book reveals why Host Leadership is set to become an important and pioneering concept in 21st century management.

- Understand how to apply hosting strategies in your organization to achieve greater agility, flexibility and responsiveness
- Become a leader with a highly tuned sense of relationship building and engagement
- Learn how to step into and out of the six NEW roles of engagement
- Adopt the four positions for a Host Leader

The traditional ‘stand and deliver’ approach to leadership falls down when it comes to engagement. Understanding how to really engage with people is the ultimate backbone of success. Intrinsically, we all know how to be hosts; now is the time to sharpen these skills and bring them to the table.

*“Host will help you build relationships and engagement both inside and outside your organization.”* — **Dr Ivan Misner, founder and Chairman, BNI**

*“These easy-to-apply principles will last you a lifetime.”* — **Philip Newman-Hall, Director/General Manager, Le Manoir aux Quat’Saisons, UK**

*“Fresh, innovative and immediately useable.”* — **John Campbell, Managing Director, Growth Coaching International, Australia**

**Dr Mark McKergow** is an international speaker, consultant and teacher. A ‘recovering physicist’, his work focuses on responsive and emergent approaches to complex situations. Mark has hosted global networks, the international Solutions Focus community, and a jazz orchestra and is co-author of the best selling *The Solutions Focus*.

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UK £11.99 / USA \$16  
ISBN 978-0-9549749-8-5  
9 780954 974985  
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