

# LEADERSHIP MANIFESTO



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## **A confession.**

I have always been an outsider in the corporate world.

In the buttoned-down world of big business, I am a bit of a misfit. I always have been.

Yes, I went to a good school. I got pretty good grades. And when I got out, I got a good job with a good company.

But, I didn't get it.

I hated the bureaucracy. I wasn't good at office politics.

I said what I thought. And, I usually said it without a "politically correct" filter. And, as you can imagine, I wasn't the greatest corporate citizen.

And, because I didn't fit in with the corporate world, I had to start a company of my own. I figured it was the only way for me to take care of my family and accomplish anything that mattered.

But even though I didn't know it at the time, I didn't have the tools I needed to build something lasting and great.

As I learned later, this is exactly what *E-Myth* author Michael Gerber calls the "entrepreneurial seizure": the failure in judgment when someone



decides to leave their job to go out on their own, but is wholly unprepared to run a business.

That was probably true for me back in 1997. But it didn't stop me.

## *Back then, I had a dream to build the company I've always wanted to work for.*

I wanted to create a company that would be a positive force for change in the world. Where everything we would think, say and do would be designed to give a great experience to everyone we met.

A place where no matter who you were or how you became part of our ecosystem—as an employee, a customer, a partner or a vendor—you would be treated with dignity, respect and a whole lot of “Wow!”

### **That's the company I wanted to build.**

Even though I couldn't see it so clearly at first, over time, this idea began to grow and take root. It started to take on a life of its own.

And while I may have struggled to get it right, this dream has consumed my waking thoughts for the better part of the last sixteen years.



I wanted to build a company that maniacally focused on putting people first. Our people. Our customers. Our vendors and partners. Everyone.

Yes, I know that sounds trite and overused—the “putting people first” part. But it’s much more personal for me.

It became my singular mission to build a place where we would not only hire great people, but where we would help them tap into their strengths and passions.

A place that would lift everyone up. Where everyone could win. Where everyone had the chance to become the best possible version of themselves.

***A place where people would get far more than a paycheck. A place where they would have a chance to grow and thrive***



and discover the best of themselves within the work they do.

A place where they wouldn’t feel like misfits. Instead they would find their tribe at work; a community of people just like them.

As I started to work on my dream and build my company, I had another

epiphany. As the company's leader, I felt deep down that it was my responsibility to believe in our people. It was my duty to see them. To hear them. To acknowledge them. To appreciate them. To honor them for who they are, not what they are not.

I didn't always get this right, but deep down I wanted to help people see their own brilliance. To help people unleash their own potential. To help people wake up to their own greatness. To their truth.

### **That's what I wanted to do.**

Because, when I'm at my best, when I'm inspired, this is who I am. This is how I can lead authentically. From my heart. This is the truth that speaks to me.

### **Let me ask you a question.**

Think about your role as a leader. Or as a parent, a teacher, a friend or colleague.

Have you ever experienced the moment when you can see the light go on in someone's eyes? An AHA! moment?

The moment when you see their chest rise in discovery? The moment when you can see their face fill with wonder and excitement about something they discovered about themselves and their world?



A moment when you see *them* the instant *they* see their own brilliance?

When this happens—when this moment of personal insight and discovery magically appears into the world—it moves me.

***When someone sees who they are and what they're capable of, it hits me in my gut.***

At the core of my being. In the deepest cell in the farthest corner of my body.

**I love this moment. I live for this moment.**

Why?

Because I believe that everyone was put here for a reason. Everyone has something that they do better than anyone else in the world.



Everyone has their own truth. A truth that they cannot deny. A truth that needs discovering. And a truth that often needs a tug from the outside to bring it into the light.

I believe that people bring their truth with them into the workplace. To our organizations. To our teams.

And I believe it is our responsibility as leaders to wake up to the notion that people want to discover who they are and why they're here in the work they do.

That's the world of work that I'm deeply passionate about. It's what I'm intensely curious about. And it's the thing that I cannot stop thinking about.

### **Because I believe the old way is dead.**

The old way—where managers rule over their people with fear and intimidation. Or control. Or create an environment of competition.

The old way—where employees compete against one another for status, raises and promotions, where one person winning means another one must lose, where one withholds from their co-workers because their managers stack-rank their people against each other—yeah, that day is over.

Instead, I dream about creating organizations filled with people who have permission to be themselves. To be real and vulnerable. To be curious about themselves. And to have the freedom to discover their truth. Freedom to speak their wisdom.

I believe that this is what great leaders, authentic leaders, do for their people. And I believe the world is waiting for more leaders like this.

And, I'll bet I'm not alone.



Today we live in a world of work that wants us to be the same. Yet we're inspired by new and unique.

Today we live in a world of work where we settle for mediocrity and "merely satisfied." Yet we honor the extraordinary.

Today we live in a world of work where we can easily be pushed into neat little boxes with all kinds of creative labels and titles. Yet we admire the crazy ones who live outside that box.

We have enough people who feel like corporate misfits.

***We have enough square pegs in round holes.  
We don't need any more square pegs.***

**It doesn't have to be this way. Instead, we can lead the change.**



As leaders, we must create a space for people to march to the beat of their own drums. People who do things differently. People who think differently. People who are willing to look within and find the talents and skills that dwell deep inside.

We need people who get who they really are. And get why they're here. And get out of their own way to be the person the universe made them to be.



We need people to find this connection to their true selves, their authentic selves. In their work. Under our watch.

**That's our job. That's the real work of leadership.**

Because I believe that when we do this, we not only make the world a better place in which to live. But it also becomes easier to grow great companies with inspired people that are doing good work and making sustainable profits.

That other thing we do, the masks that we all wear at work, the ones that stroke our leadership egos. To get the better jobs, the better offices, the raises and the promotions. The false roles that we play. That's hard to do.

It's not sustainable. It's not real. It's not profitable. And it creates companies where people are not engaged nor inspired. They have checked out long ago, but they're still sitting in a seat and drawing a paycheck.

That doesn't serve anyone.

As leaders, we can change that. As leaders, we *must* change that. We must build the organizations and teams worthy of the people we lead.

**Imagine what's possible if we do.**

Imagine a world where people are engaged. People discovering who they are and why they're here—through their work.



Imagine a world where we create an environment where trust, respect, honor and truth rule the day. Where simple and universal truths dominate the workplace.

*Imagine that, as a leader, you get the honor of inspiring folks to light up the world through the work they do.*

Imagine an organization where people are engaged authentically. Productivity is exponentially higher. Real work gets done. Good things get created by good people. And profits soar.

**It's a place where the Golden Rule rules the bottom line.**

This is the world of work I dream about. And as leaders, we can bring this dream into reality.

The world is waiting for us to make a move. There's no better time than right now.

This is my truth.

It's a truth I dreamed about sixteen years ago. A truth I didn't fully understand back then. But a truth I now get to live every day.



Now, I suppose if you've read this far, you might think that I'm an idealist. That I have a utopian view of the world of work.

Maybe so.

But I've seen how this dream plays out in the real world. I see what it does for people and organizations.

## *And, I see that the world of work is waking up to this new way of being.*

Don't get me wrong. This is not something that happens overnight. For many years, I struggled as a leader, a CEO and an entrepreneur because I needed something I didn't have and couldn't see how to make all this happen.

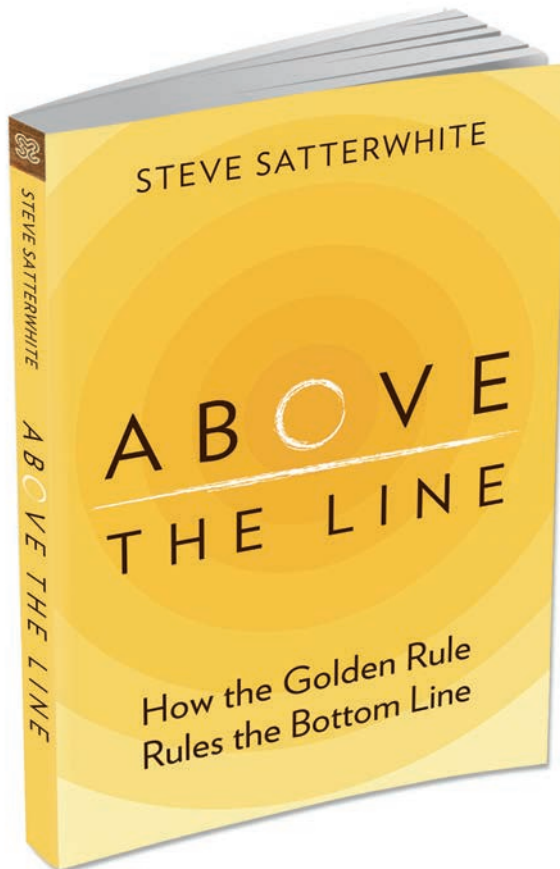
Thankfully, the people and information and wisdom that I needed came along at just the right time. And slowly, but surely, that vision for building a company like this is now coming into full focus.

But as you'll see, on the way to getting there, things didn't go exactly as I had planned.

**This is my story.**



**BELIEVE**  
*in* YOUR  
**PEOPLE**



### **Read More in Steve's Book *Above the Line***

"Above the Line is a simple formula for leaders who want to inspire people to light up the world through the work they do." - *Chip Conley*

"This is a must read for entrepreneurs because Steve tells the real story of the entrepreneurial journey, not the made for TV version. He established his company culture and kept adapting the business model until it fit his culture AND made a profit!" - *Greg Crabtree, CEO Crabtree, Rowe & Berger, PC Author of Simple Numbers, Straight Talk, Big Profits!*

