

FOREWORD

“LIKE IT OR NOT, there’s no leading without bleeding.” These words, coming from Jerry Murphy, former dean of the Graduate School of Education at Harvard University, may actually evoke a sigh of relief among people in leadership positions. You mean *all* leaders go through tough times and it’s not just me? You mean it’s not a personal flaw when my staff doesn’t agree with me, my colleagues don’t honor my achievements, and I’m exhausted at the end of the day? Can I be an excellent leader without hearing the constant hum of self-criticism in the back of my mind and constantly worrying that things will go wrong?

Incessant fear and self-criticism are not our fault, but they are our responsibility. Human beings are finely tuned to respond to threat—the fight-or-flight-or-freeze response—since the days of the saber-toothed tiger. But what happens when our threats are mostly *internal*, for example, when we struggle with common human emotions like fear, anger, or shame? That’s when we tend to make our lives more difficult. Jerry Murphy identified our most common reactions as the *three Rs*—resisting, ruminating, and rebuking ourselves—hardly the state of mind we wish to bring to leadership.

An apt metaphor is the ancient tale of two arrows: When we’re shot by an arrow, we naturally feel pain. Soon afterward, however, we begin to grieve, worry, and blame ourselves for our misfortune: “Why me? Why did this happen to me?” These reactions are akin to shooting ourselves with a second arrow. The suffering of the second arrow may sometimes last longer and be more intense than that of the first arrow. Just consider how long

it may have taken you to fall sleep after someone at work questioned how you were doing your job. Fortunately, we can bring a variety of inner skills to bear on these inner threats, as Jerry Murphy offers in this book. These skills allow us not only to tolerate and transform adversity, but even to thrive in the midst of it—to dance in the rain.

Was there ever a time in your career when you just wanted to sit down with a wise and compassionate colleague and discuss the challenges of leadership in an open and honest way, without an agenda? This book captures the generosity of such an encounter. With candid and often quite touching anecdotes from his personal life and his distinguished career in education, Murphy conveys in simple language what every leader needs to know to succeed with heartfulness at the highest levels of leadership. His simple acronym—MY DANCE—distills the essence of newly emerging fields of scientific psychology, including human values, mindfulness, experiential acceptance, savoring, self-compassion, and wisdom studies. Rather than burdening the reader with too much information, Murphy digests this body of knowledge for us and presents it in an intimate manner that leaves the reader feeling both empowered and comforted.

The real promise of this book lies in creating a bridge between reading and cultivating new mental habits in daily life. Burgeoning research over the past twenty years has shown that the daily practice of mindfulness, acceptance, and compassion can alter the structure and function of our brains and affect our lives for the better. Mindfulness alone has been shown to enhance overall life satisfaction and happiness, improve physical and mental health, enrich personal relationships, and develop healthy habits like diet and exercise, and reduce occupational burnout. All the skills that Murphy has selected for this book reflect key psychological processes that underlie healthy psychological functioning and emotional resilience.

Research suggests that the degree of benefit we derive from practicing skills like mindfulness depends on how much we practice. But who has time to practice? Fortunately, most of the skills suggested in this book can be practiced in the midst of a busy day when we take just a few minutes to breathe, to explore how we're feeling, or to offer ourselves some encouragement or kindness when things get rough. Sometimes, all we need is a moment to remind ourselves what really matters in our lives, to reset the compass to our deepest values.

This book is really about doing less, not more—less resisting, less ruminating, and less rebuking ourselves for not measuring up. It offers the possibility that we can still thrive as leaders by allowing ourselves to be more fully human and, in doing so, to extend the same generosity to others.

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