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# BEING

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THE EFFECTIVE LEADER

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*“Before you can do something  
you first must be something”*

*~Goethe*

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MICHAEL NICHOLAS

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# TESTIMONIALS

A great book, an important book for it convincingly states the crucial fact that true leadership comes from inside ourselves, if we have the courage to look; not from business schools – or books, except for this one.

~ Sir John Whitmore, author of *Coaching for Performance*

This detailed and rigorous exploration of the impact of thinking processes and beliefs on leadership is very much overdue. Michael Nicholas uncovers the habits of thinking and behaviors that will enable you to become a world class leader.

~ Steve Siebold, author of  
*177 Mental Toughness Secrets of the World Class*

In this book Michael Nicholas clearly explains how to get things done more quickly and effectively. It is built around the solid principles adopted by the most successful leaders. Don't just read this book -- use it everyday to put you on the fast track to superior results.

~ Vic Johnson, Founder, [www.asamanthinketh.net](http://www.asamanthinketh.net)

Do you want to really understand the essential principles necessary to transform your capability as an individual and as leader and equip yourself with the skills in how to put them into practice? If so, then I can't recommend *Being The Effective Leader* highly enough.

~ **Richard Millman, Group Strategy Director,  
Danoptra Gaming Group**

Few people are aware of the enormous potential that we are all born with, and even fewer take advantage of it. Everything that we achieve stems from the use of the mind – *Being The Effective Leader* will show you how.

~ **Paul Martinelli, President, LifeSuccess Consulting**

Do you want to be able to dramatically improve your influencing skills, and with them your leadership? Then *Being The Effective Leader* is a must read.

~ **Kate Burton, author of *NLP for Dummies***

If you want to make a change in your life, *Being The Effective Leader* will make a difference in your approach and give you information that will not only show you how to change, but will also inspire you to do so.

~ **Jim Sloane, Vice Chairman, Deloitte & Touche UK**

Simple and profound. The advice in *Being The Effective Leader* offers everybody, whether they consider themselves to be a leader or not, the opportunity to improve the way that they work with and influence others.

~ **Ben Bengougam, HR Director, DSGi**

If you want your business to compete, then its people must collaborate. Michael Nicholas clearly describes why this behavior is so rare and how to motivate people to be the best that they can be. A must-read for leaders at all levels.

~ **Keith Jones, Managing Director, PC World Stores Group**

I found *Being The Effective Leader* to be a must read for anyone who leads others. Not only does it explain why we are getting our current results, it offers sound business advice about how to improve them.

~ **Peter Thomson, One of the UK's Leading Strategists on  
Business and Personal Growth**

Michael Nicholas blends a wealth of both established and new leadership ideas, together with his own extensive experience, to present a straightforward formula that anybody can use.

~ **Julie Harding, European HR Director, HSBC Bank plc**



# DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my two children,  
Amy and Hannah, who seem intuitively to be  
aware of so much of its content already.

I love you both very much.



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# INTRODUCTION

*There is genius in all of us. We were born with it and it is still available to us by reconnecting to the unimaginable potential of our unlimited minds.*

~ Michael Nicholas

Almost 25 years ago, while undergoing leadership training in the military, the team that I was part of had just completed a gruelling, three-hour exercise. In competition against several other teams we had run to exhaustion, eluding “the enemy” and attempting to pass through various checkpoints at specific times. For me personally, the challenge had been intensified because I had been assigned the role of leader and the tasks set pushed me far beyond anything that had been required of me before.

We did not win – and on this occasion that did not matter. As we sat down to debrief with our instructor, my overwhelming feeling was one of spine-tingling elation. Overriding the physical exhaustion and the knowledge that this was just the first of three exercises that day, there

was a deep sense of joy, excitement, and peace that infused everything that was happening. To this day it still feels fantastic to think about it.

I have reflected on that experience and others like it many times, wondering just what it was about it that felt so good. What are the specific factors in our peak experiences that stimulate such emotional highs? I believe that the answer to this question, when integrated into our lives, can give real meaning to what we do and greatly enhance our sense of fulfilment.

On that day in training, when tested beyond my mental and physical limits as I perceived them at that time, I discovered a reservoir of internal resource of which I had no previous awareness. Simultaneously, I experienced an effortless feeling of being “in flow” as the team worked cohesively and harmoniously toward our collective goal. This was definitely a team accomplishment, yet the sense of individual achievement and fulfilment was intense. It easily overcame any discomfort that my physical exhaustion might otherwise have generated, and my self-belief took a huge leap forward. The emotional response that went with it was due to the awareness of having achieved something of significance, the sense of personal growth and having got a glimpse of my own innate potential.

This is closely related to the reason why sport has the ability to generate such passion and loyalty. Superficially, this may appear to be due to the enjoyment of the competition or the pleasure of watching your team win. However, such factors would be unlikely to generate the respect and awe with which athletes who have mastered their sport are regarded. A more complete explanation, as I have come to understand it, is that we have an intuitive awareness of the dedication, sacrifice, and commitment to goals that such people must be able to draw upon as they strive to overcome human limitation and establish new standards. As we watch them succeed in surpassing their own previous limits, it can inspire us by reminding us of what we, too, are capable.

Whenever any of us moves beyond the comfort zone of our past achievements to a new level of performance, we become increasingly aware of our potential. This is transformation at its most fundamental: the creation of a dramatic change in who we perceive ourselves to be. When this happens, the awareness that we gain brings with it the possibility of a rapid advancement in performance because, as you will see later in this book, changes in our beliefs are always reflected in our external results. Consequently, my primary intention in writing this book has been to seek to offer you a set of techniques so that **you can transform your level of awareness about yourself, the way you manage yourself, and your interactions with other people. These are the core elements of leadership.** As your belief in your potential in any one of them increases, your capability as a leader will automatically improve, as will your results.

The starting point is to become more effective at leading yourself – it is simply impossible to lead others well in any other way – yet this is not the area targeted by most of the books and courses on leadership that I've been exposed to. Indeed, I have seen highly respected experts in the field quoted as saying that in seeking to improve performance we should focus on behaviours rather than trying to change ourselves at a deeper level, because we would be unlikely to succeed in personal change. This line of thinking breeds limitation and is one of the reasons why many people are not able to effect significant and rapid change. Its impact is highly visible each time people return from a training course and find themselves unable to sustain the new behaviours that they have learned. When this happens their results, too, remain fixed.

I hope to demonstrate to you that by working first on yourself it is possible to make the shifts necessary to be successful at the personal level and, if appropriate, in your business. I aim to assist you in creating a nonlinear leap in performance, not by working harder or making minor

adjustments to the way that things have been done before, but primarily by transforming yourself so that all of your interactions become more effective and profound.

One of the challenges that you are certainly going to face is to overcome the set of self-imposed limitations that you have, almost certainly unknowingly, accepted for yourself. These can create huge resistance as you seek to change and grow. Yet it is self-evident that unless you can adapt and learn new skills, improved results will be forever elusive. Worse still, in an ever-moving environment, remaining stationary is impossible; therefore, failure to move forward results in inevitable decline.

To grow we must be prepared to venture beyond the edge of our proven area of expertise and explore the unknown. I've observed over and over again in my business experience, especially since I've been coaching professionally, the way that people are held back by imaginary stories that they tell themselves, stories that evaporate once the first few steps have been taken in a new direction. In other words, **the biggest block to our progress is our own beliefs about what we are capable of.** Christopher Logue, the contemporary poet, captures this beautifully in this brief dialogue:

Come to the edge.  
We might fall.  
Come to the edge.  
It's too high!  
COME TO THE EDGE!  
And they came,  
and he pushed,  
and they flew.

It is the very nature of change to create uncertainty, doubt, and fear at first and for this reason it is generally resisted. In other words, most of what holds people back is internal. I have found that usually people have no awareness what they are capable of until they are confronted with a problem. At this point, where they experience huge motivation to find a better way, they may discover their resourcefulness. When we are forced to make changes in this way and leave some of our old methods behind, then we may uncover capabilities that were always there but were hidden behind our habits and established patterns of doing things. This strategy is not the most effective because it relies on a problem occurring before change takes place, but it is often the one used. As Christopher Logue so eloquently describes, almost everyone discovers their wings on the way down.

As you progress through the book I shall explain to you why this happens and give you some techniques to allow you to break the cycle. This is important because true masters in every field are able to make changes without having to be **pushed** past the edge of their **perceived** capabilities. They step out willingly to take on new challenges even when the things in their life appear to be going well. In doing so, their rate of progress is dramatically increased.

One of the simplest and quickest ways to effect behavioural change is to adjust the way that you look at things. As your interpretation of the situations and challenges that you find yourself facing shifts, so you will automatically take different actions. This is clearly evident, for example, in the diversity of responses in a crowd exposed to a major incident. Some may attempt to run while others remain to the end to help; some may experience terror that immobilises them, while others overcome this with courage and take charge. Although everyone is faced with the same external conditions, their perception drives very different responses. Therefore, by seeking to shift your perception of things as they happen to you, the process of achieving behavioural change can be

much simplified. To do so is primarily a question of training yourself to use your mind differently.

This is not to say that change will necessarily ever be easy – it takes courage to do things differently, to seek to take command of your life and break away from established patterns of thinking that have been ingrained for many years. Even realising what needs to be done can be hard; our natural tendency is to refuse to believe, or at least to think odd, anything that is not familiar or that we don't understand. It is the trait that English poet W. H. Auden was referring to when he wrote, "We would rather be ruined than changed; we would rather die in our dread than climb the cross of the moment and let our illusions die." The impact of our inability to recognise our own development needs can be highly detrimental to our progress, not least because it will tend to cause us to believe in our own misguided assessment of our capabilities.

I encourage you to frequently remind yourself of this point as you read. Although it is important to question everything that we hear or read rather than to accept things at face value, it is also vital to learn not to reject ideas simply because they are different from our own. I'm sure you can think of times when something that you were absolutely certain about was proven to be wrong. The question is, how willing are you to deliberately seek to identify areas where your thinking is flawed? This will have a major influence on your rate of progress. If you prefer to hold rigidly to your current ideas and beliefs you will block your future growth. Conversely, the faster you are able to shift your thinking the more rapidly you will progress.

I am well aware that this may sound obvious; however, simple observation demonstrates that there is a huge difference between what we know and what we do. The challenge is to understand why it is so common that people fail to put into practice what they know, even when they are aware of the benefits to be gained from doing so. This requires a better understanding of how the mind works.

In medicine it has been known for years, and is now widely accepted, that the mind controls the body. Research in immunology has clearly demonstrated that there is a direct correlation between our state of mind and the immune function, with immunity being improved significantly by positive states of consciousness. The same thing is also true in relation to our results in the world. I will demonstrate the mechanism by which the mind creates all of our results and in the process, enables you to maximise your ability to take advantage of your opportunities.

A major element in improving effectiveness is the ability to overcome blocks to progress. Most people don't realise that moving past their doubts and fears to expand self-awareness and self-confidence can be exhilarating. The challenge is to prevent our doubts from gripping us in a way that inhibits action and makes us powerless. Many aspects of this book are aimed at helping you to recognise your power and step into it.

I want to clarify what I mean by the word "power" in this context. In the sense that I shall use it there is no relationship to the way that many people think of it; that is, as having control over others. This is the goal of egomaniacs and is force, not power. Force has limited ability to affect anything for the good because it always produces opposition and automatically creates an opposing counterforce. By polarising rather than unifying it escalates conflict and creates a system of winners and losers. Winners then have to perpetually be on the attack or defence to maintain their position; thus, the egomaniacs don't realise that their actions actually block them from experiencing the feeling of power that they are seeking. They will always struggle and never be satisfied. At the same time, the "losers" that they create are dissatisfied and underperform. This is exhausting for everyone and in business is extremely costly as it can never produce the best results.

Power refers to an internal capability that, like gravity, does not move against anything and cannot be resisted. The type of power that I am talking about is total and complete in itself, requiring nothing from the outside. This is what Nelson Mandela accessed to remain strong, even to become stronger, during 27 years of incarceration. Accessing your true power will have the impact of making you less controlling and manipulative of others. You will care more and gain the ability to empathise with many more people – a skill that is critical if you are seeking to influence them. Essentially, you gain the ability to create the win-win solutions that most inspire others to be their best. It is the power within yourself that enables you to change your perceptions, get yourself to do the things that you want to do, take charge of your growth, create joy and satisfaction in your life, open up to other people, and allow yourself to operate from a place of authenticity. Instead of resisting, as force does, power works synergistically with all other things so that the whole becomes much greater than the sum of its parts.

**If you do not own your power you will always experience fear** because you will have set up a dependency on the outside world being a certain way in order for you to experience happiness. This automatically creates the fear of loss, together with a sense of helplessness, because it is impossible for anyone to control what happens outside them – and attempting to do so can be massively stressful. Although this may happen at a subconscious level, this does not diminish its impact. There is a real fear of losing the good feeling that has subconsciously been associated with something in the outside world.

The solution to feeling good more of the time, therefore, is to realise that the source of the feeling is actually inside you and that it is created by your interpretation of what is going on outside. It is within your capabilities to change your experience at any moment by using your mind differently.

Your internal power is the foundation of the kind of leadership that I encourage you to develop. This is the reason why the most effective starting point is to take responsibility for leading yourself. Furthermore, once you learn to liberate your own inherent power you will gain the capability to release it in other people. This process never works the other way around – you have to start with yourself.

For many people this is a massive paradigm shift. I hope that as you read you will learn to push through your own self-doubts and in the process, let go of the underlying fear of helplessness that automatically arises if we believe that we cannot change our circumstances. This deeper level of fear can be absolutely paralysing, as I describe in Chapter 3. However, if we can learn to accept our fears and observe them from a position of power, their influence on the choices that we make is removed, and they lose their control over us. We then gain the ability to lead much more effectively.

I hope that this book will offer some new ideas to anyone who has an interest in leadership. It is also my intention that it may provide a wake-up call for many people who haven't yet realised that they are leaders, whether or not they are in a leadership position, and that by developing more of their potential they will be able to transform their capabilities. I will be delighted if I can help you to generate a deep motivation to learn, especially if that desire then becomes an ongoing part of your life; this is the only sure path to greatness.

Three of my relatives were top-class orchestral musicians up until their retirement. To first develop and then retain this standard that enabled them to play at the highest level took persistence and dedication to their instruments on a daily basis for over 40 years. I believe that we can all learn from this approach: to be the best that we can be in any field of endeavour requires constant practice and application.

There are many things we do daily that we accept as requirements for a healthy life, such as eating, keeping ourselves clean, and maintaining our living environment. We know that none of these activities has a lasting effect, and we unquestioningly accept the need to repeat them on a frequent basis. Unfortunately, I know from working with my clients that there is often huge resistance to practicing the personal development skills that I suggest in this book in the same way. This is normal and to be expected; however, personal development and leadership are inextricably linked. Very few people make significant progress without first being prepared to put in some additional effort toward personal growth. Just as getting fit requires discipline and repetition, so it is with creating the changes in the mind that lead to higher performance.

There is an old saying that champions don't become champions in the ring – they are merely recognised there. The thing that enables world-class performers to develop the skills necessary for success is the discipline of their daily routine; their success is, in fact, just a collection of habits. What many people do not realise is that, unfortunately, so is failure.

If you wish to become world-class in leadership you will need new habits, so I hope that you will practice the disciplines suggested in the eight techniques associated with Chapters 2 through 9. Any one of them is powerful enough to transform your results by installing the habits of success into your daily activities. There may be all sorts of imagined obstacles in your way, but if you will practice even a subset of these ideas until they become automatic, you will see improvements in your life.

The evidence that we all have a startling ability to effect such change, once we allow ourselves to believe in our potential, is overwhelming. The foremost brain research in the world today has demonstrated

that it is impossible to even identify a definable limit to this potential. Therefore, above all, I hope that as you progress through the book you will experience an increasing awareness of your capabilities and belief in yourself. I am not aware of any other single factor that will create a bigger transformation in your life and the fulfilment that you are able to get from it.