“This groundbreaking book is the first one that precisely describes how to build bridges between the ‘intellectually compelling’ and the ‘emotionally engaging.’ A must have for all leaders!”

Tom de Swaan, Chairman of the Supervisory Board of Van Lanschot Bankiers

“Chris and Didier share their deep experience with their incomparable, provocative and politically incorrect style. The result is a must-have for all leaders involved in large-scale changes. As a leader, I have always been convinced that I had to work on more than just the rationale and intellectual agenda. This book provides concrete examples and recipes for leaders on how to use also their personal style (behavioural agenda) and passion/belief (emotional agenda) to successfully engage their whole organization in deep changes.”

Peter Baltussen, CEO, Commercial Bank of Dubai

“Smart people are a privilege to lead. They are also very challenging. ... *Engaging Leadership* provides exceptional hints on how to successfully direct such sensitive and smart followers.”

Mike Dalton, President, McAfee EMEA

“This book shows that, whether in Africa, North or South America, Asia, Europe, or Australasia, the fundamentals of running a business and engaging humans are the same.”

Dr Jose Carlos Ribeiro, Principal Partner of Ribeiro & Barreto Advogados

“Chris and Didier share here the summary of their work with some of the world’s leading firms in their respective fields.

They demonstrate how successful leaders work through rationale, style, and emotions to engage people towards a new and shared vision.”

Jean Claude Larréché, Alfred Heineken Professor of Marketing, INSEAD, and author of the best selling book *The Momentum Effect*

“Engaging Leadership succeeds in demonstrating the critical importance for leaders to work on three motivational fronts at the same time: they must be intellectually clear and convincing, their acts must support and exemplify the strategic intent, and they must be able to create the conditions for success by building a strong emotional agenda.”

Arthur Yeung, Associate Dean and Philips Chair Professor of HRM, CEIBS, Ex-CHO, Acer Group

“Short, to the point, and politically incorrect, this book is also very deep and well documented. *Engaging Leadership* is the best recipe book on how to encourage large numbers of people into a new direction.”

Michel Abitbol, CEO, Elle et Lui Group

“This book, based on years of experience with executives from many companies and industries, provides us with valuable practical insight on how to change our own and others’ behavior in order to accelerate implementation and develop new skills, and on the value of strategy. It succeeds in addressing burning issues for practicing managers.”

Juan Rada, Senior Vice President, Public Sector and Education Business Unit, Oracle Corporation Europe

ENGAGING LEADERSHIP

Three Agendas for Sustaining
Achievement

Didier Marlier,

Chris Parker

and

Mobilizing Teams International

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HOW THIS BOOK WAS CONCEIVED

Chris and Didier met in IMD in 1988, as professor and student.¹ For Didier, Chris was an unorthodox, lively, passionate, and generous leadership professor. For Chris, Didier was a rebellious, pony-tailed MBA student with a high potential.

Eight years later they met again in a bar in Lutry (Switzerland), sharing the same frustration that both the academic institutions and the strategy consultancies were failing to support their clients in terms of real behavioral change.

They therefore decided to respond to the “Call for adventure” (see Chapter 6) and engage in their “heroic journey,” Chris leaving a well-paid, highly regarded tenure at IMD, Didier burying his dream of becoming a partner with the consulting firm he was working for.

An informal gathering in 2003 in Villars of 20 consultants and academics gave birth to the MTI Network with which they are fully engaged today.²

This network is resolutely pragmatic, hands-on and down to earth in its approach, as we hope this book will also be. We have not attempted to write an academic thesis or essay; we have gathered and summarized our experience in leadership engagement and tried to share it with you.

Together, we are moved by a set of evolving beliefs. Here is where these are today:

- Clarity, meaning, and capacity to influence are crucial if an organization intends to engage its employees in changes which produce long-lasting results.
- Reality is constructed by the language we use: The recurring language people hear in organizations is what will focus their attention.
- “People are more likely to act their way into a new way of thinking

than think their way into a new way of acting.”³ Behavioral change takes place through feedback and experimentation with new value-creating behaviors rather than through preaching and slide shows. Just try it and build from there.

- Stories and behaviors are more powerful than strategies. People believe in what they see. Strategy becomes an illusion if leaders do not consistently walk the talk. People retain stories more than facts.
- Engage rather than selling: Engaging leaders mobilize their teams’ intellectual, emotional, and creative capacities, rather than trying to sell change to a passive audience. People desire engagement!
- Exploration and conclusion: Leaders who explore with their teams prior to driving conclusions create a unique competitive advantage for their organizations. Engage then plan as much as plan and engage!
- Working on the three agendas: The basis for sustainable business success rests upon co-creating clarity around the strategic agenda (*logos*), defining the rules of engagement which will support it (*ethos*), and setting conditions for people to do and be their best (*pathos*). People engage when there is coherence between the three agendas.
- Recovery from setbacks is a skill set that can be learned. “Being on the edge” or “ahead of the pack” is a creative state where people make mistakes. Courageous vulnerability is an engaging quality.

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Chris Parker (British, BA, MA, C. Psychology, chartered occupational psychologist) has been teaching organizational behavior and leadership at Cranfield (Director of In-Company Programs 1979-86) and IMD (professor 1986-96). The purpose underlying all Chris's professional work is to help leaders create the conditions for themselves and others to be and do their best. He is driven by releasing potential and energy, and working with the positive human core.

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Didier (Summer 2008)

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Chris (Summer 2008)

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PURPOSE AND STRUCTURE

People don't follow strategies, they follow behaviors!

Stories are more powerful than strategies!

Chris is purposefully provocative when he addresses large audiences of executives in public speeches and in-company seminars. He emphasizes that the power of “strategy” has been overdone in the recent business history. Behaviors, passion, and energy are the “Holy Grail” we should be looking for, not the illusory “right strategy.”

In today's internet-speed environment, passionate commitment to being ahead of the game is as important as having the right strategy. In Toyota, senior managers preach: “Reform business when business is good.” They demand the apparently impossible and, while there is a definite hierarchy, they insist that people argue for new approaches, and provide training and tools to do that in a “professional way.” They break classic rules of strategy, trying to do too much. They put customers first, dealers second, and the company last.¹ Their passionate culture gives them the competitive advantage that many seek to emulate. Their customers keep on buying repeatedly and the company has so much cash that it is referred to as Toyota Bank by many today.

In the summer of 2007, we were listening to a conversation among leaders of a team that was pivotal to the success of a large merger between two European companies. They were commenting the recent visit to their office by the CEO. The feedback was:

“He was cold and distant, and his presentation was so polished that it came across as unauthentic.”

“What was he really trying to say?”

“Can we believe him?”

“Was he sincere when complimenting our team?”

“His vision was vague and unclear to me.”

“He came across as disengaged and consequently disengaged me.”

“He had no convincing story about the merger.”

“I am worried; he doesn’t seem to understand our company’s culture or value it.”

To make things worse, the team leader had just come back from a top management meeting that was intended to create a company-wide engagement process. This process was driven by a very well-known and well-intentioned strategy consulting firm. The consultants’ focus on strategy was evident but it was only a consolidation of what everyone expected. There was nothing engaging, let alone inspiring. The best one could say was that enthusiasm wasn’t sky-high: “Basically, we didn’t learn anything new. ... It was a rather flat non-event. ... It was process driven. ... The mistrust between the merging partners hasn’t gone away. ... There is a lack of clarity. ... A lot of people are disillusioned. ... Our colleagues were disappointed by the new style of working. ... We should keep up our old culture and strengthen our solidarity—there are tough times ahead.”

Why on earth, we were thinking, did the consultants move away from their field of expertise (selling ideas and presentations) to a place where their lack of real ability was so blatantly obvious (engagement and implementation)?

Engaging Leadership is our contribution to the huge transformations that businesses need to achieve if they wish to survive in tomorrow’s ever-faster changing environment. Many boards, management teams, and individual leaders voice their convictions: maintaining the organizational status quo when everything moves so rapidly around us makes no logical sense; change is essential—but in which direction and how? This book is the summary of our collective experience in guiding change. The intention is to demystify and not theorize. It is not a “21-step recipe” book; it is about how “everyday leaders” can guide people through more gratifying journeys towards success.

THE STRUCTURE

We have attempted to keep this book as short and meaningful as possible. Like us, you may be sick and tired of those “management books” where the real content could have been summarized in five pages, but for some reason has been diluted into a 450-page brick instead.

Here is how the book is structured:

- Chapter 1 builds the case for the change that is needed in the way we lead our organizations. It provides an overview of the “three agendas of leadership.”
- Chapter 2 clarifies what we mean by the “strategic/intellectual agenda” and suggests ways to engage people in it.
- Chapter 3 looks at how leaders should lead through value-building behaviors, and the consequences of not doing so.
- Chapter 4 studies the “emotional agenda.” It attempts to demonstrate that this is a vital, bottom-line-oriented element of successfully leading towards sustainable results.
- Chapter 5 ties all this together; it offers a robust three-step process to lead people through change and explains what the leadership engagement process is about.
- Chapter 6 draws a parallel between Joseph Campbell’s celebrated research on the universal myth (termed the Monomyth) and the journey of leaders on their way to success.