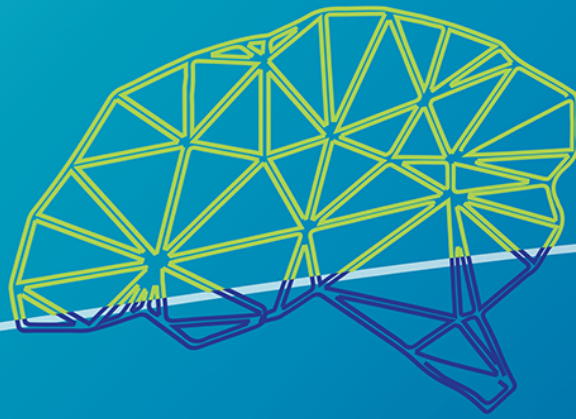


'Being a leader requires the best version of you, leading the best version of us. *Leading Above the Line* shows how that is done. Brilliant!'
MATT CHURCH, author of *Rise Up: An evolution in leadership* and founder of Thought Leaders

LEADING ABOVE THE LINE



Applying neuroscience to build
psychologically safe and thriving teams

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LEADING ABOVE THE LINE: APPLYING NEUROSCIENCE TO BUILD PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE AND THRIVING TEAMS

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

PART 1

AWARE

CHAPTER 1 Why lead above-the-line?

CHAPTER 2 Everyone needs above-the-line leadership

PART 2

LEAD

CHAPTER 3 Why lead yourself above-the-line?

CHAPTER 4 How to lead yourself above-the-line

CHAPTER 5 Why lead your employees above-the-line?

CHAPTER 6 How to lead employees above-the-line

CHAPTER 7 Are you leading a thriving ecosystem or toxic ego-system?

CHAPTER 8 Building a thriving (above-the-line) team

CONCLUSION Soaring above-the-line



DETAILED BOOK SUMMARY

'It's impossible to build an organisation that's fit for the future, without building one that's fit for human beings.'—Gary Hamel

The psychological environment of the contemporary workplace is increasingly harsh, even hostile, to optimal human performance. A poor climate affects how the executive brain functions, making it harder to think and relate effectively. Contributing our best to organisational success depends on the accessibility of our highest cognitive and psychological abilities which become increasingly unavailable in an adverse milieu.

The first two chapters of *Leading Above the Line* help the reader understand how workplace challenges result from the psychological environment slipping below what supports humans to function at their best. We call this 'below-the-line'. Many current workplace challenges result from poor interpersonal interactions and unrealistic expectations. In fact, workplaces may unintentionally create conditions for employees that work directly against their strategic goals.

Some workplaces are seriously struggling. Bullying, incivility, disengagement, high turnover and low productivity are all manifestations of a workplace functioning far below-the-line. A poor interpersonal environment and unreasonable expectations undermine the capacity of employees to function anywhere near their capacity and potential.

Establishing the interpersonal and systemic changes needed to help workplaces thrive can be elusive, particularly in this time of great change, uncertainty and complexity.

Humans need a positive and healthy environment to function well

Modern workplace demands require humans to function well cognitively and psychologically. We need our brain to function optimally to think strategically, laterally and creatively, to make decisions with increasing complexity in the context of unpredictability and uncertainty. Equally important is that our interpersonal relationships depend on our capacity for empathy, positive relationships, self-awareness and self-management. These skills allow us to see situations from different perspectives including viewpoints with which we may not agree and to cultivate an interpersonally healthy environment, where people feel psychologically and physically safe.

The crisis of COVID-19 has provided leaders with a once in a lifetime opportunity of enforced reflection on our workplaces. Many of us have deeply reflected on the importance of the psychological and mental health of our team environment and are challenged by the responsibility of positively influencing this critical aspect in the new era in which we have found ourselves.

Your organisation and employees both deserve and require the benefits of a psychological environment that enables humans to perform at their peak. Senior leaders must safeguard and elevate the ecosystem to achieve organisational success and ensure their workplace thrives.

Although some elements of the exploration in **Part One: Aware** are negative or even disheartening, we cannot manage what we cannot consider, think and talk about. These two chapters give greater insight into the research, evidence backed up by experience that enables us to bring more refined language and perspectives to modern workplace dilemmas.



This book explores four key areas of interest for me:

- Why do workplaces end up at such different places in terms of the psychological environment?
- What steps can leaders take to be active stewards of the psychological environment and shift floundering workplaces to healthier functioning?
- How can we apply the latest neuroscience and emerging psychological research to elevate and sustain the quality of interpersonal relationships at work?
- As we emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic, how can we reshape our workplaces to better serve our human needs to optimise our performance, productivity, relationships and wellbeing?

When we lead our teams and organisations to above-the-line functioning, there are four key areas to address:

- 1) ***Understand the psychological environment:*** be aware of the ways interpersonal relationships and behaviours influence and shape the workplace ecosystem.

You cannot shape what you cannot see.

- 2) ***Lead yourself:*** cultivate self-leadership to optimise your cognitive and psychological agility, performance and wellbeing; become a powerfully, positive influence for others.

You can't lead others if you can't lead yourself.

- 3) ***Lead your employees*** to shine, optimising their potential and strengths, feel valued and trusted, while navigating our evolving and complex world.

Leading relationships are crucial for performance, engagement and wellbeing.

- 4) ***Create a thriving, high-performing team*** buoyed by an optimistic and appreciative climate where it's safe to contribute and learn.

Teams need thriving ecosystems, not toxic ego-systems.



In **Part Two: Lead** we consider in detail, the three necessary elements of leading our employees above-the-line.

Leading yourself

It starts, first and foremost, with leading you. Yes ... you.

We need to lead ourselves above-the-line before we can genuinely lead others above-the-line. Most leaders give scant attention to how they lead themselves, yet it is pivotal to how we lead others.

Chapters Three and Four explore why leading yourself above-the-line provides a strong foundation for leading yourself and others effectively and explores how to apply this game-changing leadership approach through cultivating self-leadership.

Self-leadership is an emerging concept that encourages us to apply leadership principles, values and practises to leading ourselves. It requires us to take high-level self-awareness, self-direction and self-management. Personal responsibility, ownership of our energy, performance, wellbeing and openness to learning, ensuring we have a greater positive impact on others. Positive self-leaders naturally create a climate that is psychologically safe, where relationships are built on respect, authenticity and integrity. These form fertile ground for a high-performing work environment for employees and teams, and for your organisation to flourish.

Leading ourselves well is born from finding a deeper level of self-awareness and self-acceptance that does not require us to be perfect at one end of the continuum, or worthless at the other. Self-leadership enables us to optimise our functioning, build on our potential, strengths, values, preferences, talents and wisdom. It is an exceptional above-the-line and psychologically responsible step we can take to bring our best selves to work.

Lead your employees

Chapters Five and Six explore why above-the-line relationships with employees are so necessary and how we can take the necessary steps to build such positive relationships.

Employees' performance and wellbeing are highly impacted by the relationship they have with their leader or manager. This relationship is a central factor in employees' experience of work and even more vital, like a lifeline, at this time of unpredictability and uncertainty.

We explore the dynamics that can be at play when leaders lead far below-the-line, why this badly impacts performance and productivity and how toxic this can be on employees' wellbeing.

Interpersonal neurobiology shines a light on how this occurs. The relationships leaders build with employees will literally impact the wiring of their brains. Great leaders bring out the best in employees, but with poor leaders, employees are more likely to struggle. The fear or strain generated from poor leadership will influence and activate the reptile brain, making it harder to optimise your executive brain functioning. End result: It will be harder for employees to think and relax, to be creative and strategic.

Chapter Six outlines steps we can use to build above-the-line relationships with our individual employees. It also reflects on how to employ the right people and how to build positive, strength-based relationships that support learning and development. Navigating tricky conversations and providing engaging and motivating feedback are essential parts of the toolkit for supporting an above-the-line workplace.

Leading your team

Chapters Seven and Eight addresses the steps we can take to lead and manage inter-relationships within the team and workplace to rise above-the-line.

The psychological environment or ecosystem your people are marinating in each day has a huge and powerful impact on them at every level.

A thriving ecosystem, where employees feel valued and psychologically safe to learn, ensures they can perform at their peak cognitively and psychologically. The impact can be exceptionally positive as it unleashes the potential of the workforce—they are primed to think and perform at their peak. They don't hesitate to ask questions and take the interpersonal risks of learning. This environment, like any flourishing ecosystem supports and sustains individuals in cohesive ways, and naturally fosters productive collaboration and teamwork.

A toxic 'ego-system', where people feel unsafe, unvalued and where toxic interpersonal interactions are rife, reinforces reptile brain functioning that undermines all workplace aspirations, performances and values.

These chapters examine the dynamics of ecosystems and the way that teams can be enhanced by nutrients or overwhelmed with toxins. Protective factors and risk factors can support or undermine the workplace ecosystem's capacity to thrive. Leaders can learn to amplify the protective factors and reduce risk factors at the levels of workplace, leadership, workplace culture and employees to optimise the thriving ecosystem.

Helping yourself and your team to *soar above-the-line* would be the best outcome of implementing the ideas contained in this book.

From an early age, I have observed a great deal of squandered potential in workplaces, schools and in our community. When we lead ourselves and others below-the-line, this is the very unfortunate outcome.

I'm hoping this book will inspire you to take some steps, small or big, to minimise the likelihood of this through more intentionally influencing the psychological and interpersonal workplace environment in which you operate.

I'm grateful for human curiosity and advances in technology, that have progressed our understanding of the brain, human needs, motivators and behaviours. Excellent strides have been achieved in recent decades making the unconscious, conscious and neuroscience accessible. We've forged new pathways that can advance our society and workplaces to become kinder, more civil and more psychologically responsible and safe.

Post-pandemic, we have a once-in-a lifetime opportunity to reshape our workplaces. Let's lead ourselves, our employees and our workplaces to soar above-the-line for everyone's benefit.

