

O N E 2 3 L T D . C O M

LESSONS FROM THE COMFY CHAIRS

What we learned about leadership
during our conversations in 2024.



Great leadership isn't about perfection.

I struggled to understand this as a young leader. I thought I needed to be right, to know the answers, and to be the best at everything. I was wrong.

The best leaders are imperfect. They show up with authenticity, humility, and empathy. They are curious and eager to learn. They say, "I don't know." They seek out people who are smarter and more experienced. They want to grow. They understand that leading is an act of love.

Through my work in learning and organizational development and now hosting *The Comfy Chairs* podcast, I've had the privilege of exploring what makes leadership meaningful and effective. Time and again, it's these same themes that stand out: authenticity, connection, and the willingness to change.

This ebook is a reflection of those lessons. It's a collection of ideas and insights to inspire you, challenge you, and equip you for the journey ahead. My hope is that as you read, you'll find not only practical tools but also the encouragement to lead with love.

Kate Johnson

A handwritten signature in teal ink, consisting of the letters 'KJ' in a stylized, cursive font.

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introduction



Change is hard. This is an old and familiar truth. And while leaders may be tempted to focus only on the challenges they face when leading others through change, if they only look outside themselves they have missed the mark.

The real change that leaders must confront is often less visible. It is their own growth and ongoing development. This is the first work of a leader: to understand the change they need to accomplish in themselves.

This is the heart of true leadership: seeking and striving to be better for the sake of the people you lead.

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EMPLOYEES DESERVE
LEADERS THAT ARE
DOING THE HARD WORK
OF GETTING BETTER.

[Episode 14 | Continue to grow & change](#)

— ” —

introduction

This resource is inspired by the conversations from *The Comfy Chairs* podcast—a space where stories, insights, and practical wisdom are invited and we get to explore the heart of leadership. Each lesson in this ebook is rooted in a shared belief: **leadership is about more than achieving results.** It's about creating meaningful experiences, fostering trust, and showing up as the best version of yourself, even when the path is uncertain.

In these pages, you'll find ideas to spark reflection, tools to inspire action, and practices to help you grow. You'll see how themes like authenticity, adaptability, connection, purpose, and curiosity intertwine to shape the leader you're becoming.

This is your invitation to pause, explore, and lean into the work of leadership—not just for the benefit of your teams and organizations, but for your own growth and fulfillment.



2
be yourself



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IT'S OKAY TO HAVE WEAKNESSES.
WE JUST WE DON'T LIKE TO TALK
ABOUT IT BECAUSE IT MAKES US
FEEL LIKE WE'RE NOT ABLE TO
SHOW UP THE WAY WE WANT TO.

Episode 12 | Constantly narrating your environment

”

Leading relies on continuous self-reflection and growth.

It starts with you.

Leadership begins with understanding and embracing your authentic self. This includes everything you do well, your best characteristics, and each and every flaw you have.

Your greatest asset as a leader is you. You have to know yourself. Because without a full understanding of your imperfect and wonderful self, you cannot effectively lead the imperfect and wonderful people who need you.

This means bringing your whole, authentic self to work and treating others with dignity, empathy, and a genuine desire for their wellbeing. It also means acknowledging that each person has a unique, rich, and unknowable inner life. When we have respect and even awe for this fact, and a genuine desire to bring out the best in one another, organizations and individuals can find deeper fulfillment and meaning in their work.

REFLECT. GROW. LEAD.

DISCOVER FRESH INSIGHTS IN EPISODES OF *THE COMFY CHAIRS* PODCAST.

[Episode #7 It's a very personal process](#)

[Episode #8 It's cool to be you](#)

[Episode #18 It's your signature](#)

[Episode #20 You don't have to fake anything](#)

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THE GOAL OF LEADERSHIP IS
NEVER PERFECTION, BECAUSE
PEOPLE ARE NOT PERFECT.
THE GOAL IS A LITTLE BETTER,
A LITTLE BETTER EVERY DAY.

Episode 25 | Envision a leader

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Lead authentically.

View work as a subset of life, not separate from it. Integrate your **values** into the workplace to find **meaning** and **purpose**.

Create work environments where employees can thrive as whole human beings. This means demonstrating **care**, **compassion**, and a **commitment** to each person's inherent worth.

As technology continues to advance, elevate **human-centered capabilities** as essential rather than optional.

Self-knowledge and inner reflection are crucial. Set aside dedicated "think time" for **self-discovery** and to uncover your innate **strengths** and passions.

Be willing to share your **lessons learned** to help others on a similar journey. Lifting others up is part of the path to authenticity and confidence.


Practice **honesty**, **accountability**, and **serving** others as a starting point to develop and sustain strong character.

Keep self-awareness, self-regulation, and a commitment to living according to your principles at the center of your **actions** and **decision-making**.

Model the **character** you want to see in your teams. Be **vulnerable**, acknowledge mistakes, and work on continuous personal growth.

Develop **empathy** and **curiosity** about others' perspectives, communication styles, and needs to greatly improve **mutual understanding**.

Set clear expectations and be **transparent** about your own listening preferences, this can help build more **productive** and **inclusive** communication.



how to adapt



Navigating change and uncertainty requires a mindset of adaptability and the courage to grow.

Adaptability is built through curiosity, self-compassion, and learning.

All too often, we talk about resilience when we talk about change. The problem isn't with resiliency itself - it's a good and necessary characteristic. The problem is that things that are resilient don't actually change.

Leadership and the workplace encounter too much change to make resilience the answer. Instead, we need to adapt.

Adaptability is a vital skill we can learn and cultivate. It does require a willingness to evolve over time, but when we adapt, we experience greater self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and a willingness to embrace the discomfort of change.

That discomfort - fear even - is a catalyst for growth and joy. When we take action and embrace it, seek joy, and commit to continuous growth, we can become more adaptable and effective leaders, and even live more fulfilling lives.

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ACTION IS THE ANTITHESIS OF OVERTHINKING.

Episode 16 | Is it useful?

”

TAKE ACTION

LEADERSHIP IS ABOUT CHOOSING TO LEARN & GROW. BOOK A QUICK TUNE-UP TO TAKE THE FIRST STEP.

You can adapt.

Adaptability is not an instantaneous process. Take **small steps** to move forward, even when facing major challenges.

Ask for **help and support** from others. No one has to face major changes alone.

Understand that change can be emotionally challenging. Extend **grace and compassion** to yourself and others during times of transition.

Adopt a **forward-looking** perspective when facing change, focusing on the potential **benefits** rather than solely on what is being lost.

Reflect on your **successes and failures**. Then empower and encourage employees to learn from their mistakes and experiment with new approaches.

Fear is a natural part of the human experience, even for leaders. Rather than trying to eliminate fear, learn to **leverage fear** to drive toward positive change.

Develop **self-awareness** around your fears, and consciously choose how to respond to them. Pause and ask "**Who do I want to be in this moment?**" to guide your actions.

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ANYTIME WE ARE LEADING CHANGE, OUR FIRST JOB IS COMPASSION, BECAUSE IT'S GOING TO BE HARD, EVEN IF IT'S A GOOD CHANGE, EVEN IF IT'S A CHANGE THAT PEOPLE ASKED FOR, WE'RE STILL GOING TO BE AFRAID

Episode 24 | Natural to the human mind

”

ACT WITH EMPATHY. LEAD WITH LOVE.

LISTEN TO THE *THE COMFY CHAIRS* PODCAST FOR MORE INSIGHTS.

[Episode #1 It's a road that you take](#)

[Episode #2 We're talking about change](#)

[Episode #24 Natural to the human mind](#)

how to connect



Great leadership is built on relationships, empathy, and connection.

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THE PERFORMANCE OF OUR
BUSINESSES IS BASED ON
THE EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE
OF OUR EMPLOYEES

Episode 15 | Connection that fulfills

”

Human connection is the bedrock of effective leadership.

Leading is fundamentally about the human elements of work - building relationships, aligning people to purpose, and tapping into our innate desire for connection and meaning. This should be the foundation for how leaders approach their role.

Like so many aspects of leadership, you can start with your own connections. Fostering friendships at work can and should be an intentional priority. These relationships can have a significant impact on your own engagement, feelings of psychological safety, and overall performance.

Then consider encouraging connection on your team. Your employees will experience the same benefits you do: a positive impact on their well-being and organizational success. You can make this a natural aspect of your team when you prioritize kindness, self-awareness, and inclusion. Your commitment to pursuing and applying emotional intelligence will set the stage for your team to feel a deep sense of belonging.

Create genuine connection.

Start with **self-knowledge**. Understand your own needs and desires for belonging, and be intentional about meeting those needs.

Emotional intelligence is not just about self-awareness and understanding emotions, but about leveraging emotions. Be **transparent, authentic**, and **kind** to connect with people and to drive results .

Work **friendships** are valuable and contribute to belonging, accountability, and a positive work culture. Invest first in your own friendships.

Support healthy work friendships for other. This can be done through simple, intentional actions like allowing time for **informal interactions**, facilitating **team-building** activities, and being a role model for positive work relationships.

Model kind and inclusive behaviors. Set the tone by treating everyone with **compassion** and **respect**.

Recognize loneliness as a public health issue. Advocate for greater awareness and resources to **support mental health** and social connection.

Measure and incentivize **belonging**. Explore how to incorporate metrics related to connection and belonging into your **goals** and **performance**.

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WE WOULD CHANGE SO MUCH
ABOUT PERSONAL EXPERIENCE,
HUMAN INTERACTIONS, OUR
RELATIONSHIPS, IF WE COULD
JUST STOP AND BE PRESENT.

Episode 20 | You don't have to fake anything

”

EXPLORE HUMAN CONNECTION.

Learn more in these episodes of *The Comfy Chairs* podcast.

[Episode #4 We are wired to connect](#)

[Episode #5 That person you can go to](#)

[Episode #15 Connection that fulfills](#)



how to tell
your story



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GOOD STORIES NEED TO BE TRUE FOR YOUR PEOPLE. HOW DO THEY CONNECT THEM TO THE WORK, TO SUCCESS, TO EACH OTHER, OR THE ORGANIZATION?

Episode 11 | We all have one

”

Leadership gains depth and impact when grounded in purpose and shared through authentic storytelling.

Why storytelling? We are wired to connect. We are wired for stories. And stories connect us.

Storytelling is a powerful learning technique and leadership practice. Stories allow you to impart information, knowledge, and wisdom. They are the bridge between people and purpose.

Leaders who understand this weave meaning into the workplace, enable rising productivity, and provide fulfilling work experiences for everyone. This includes the willingness and vulnerability to share your own story and the discernment and commitment to take part in your team's shared story.

Storytelling also allows you to connect individual purpose and organizational mission. While uncovering your personal purpose is a deeply personal and evolving journey, you have the ability to build relationships with the stories you gather along the way. The journey of discovering a team's purpose is made possible when leaders and employees share stories.

**Storytelling lets us
experience our
shared humanity.**

Become a storyteller.

Recognize that storytelling is a powerful tool for building relationships, communicating effectively, and creating a cohesive work environment.

Storytelling is a powerful tool for building understanding and finding common ground, even across differences. **Seek out** and **amplify** stories that are not easily accessible or mainstream to shed light on important issues and experiences that deserve attention.

Personal stories and vulnerability from leaders can help break down barriers, foster trust, and inspire others. **Share** your "why" and **be open** about your own experiences to create a sense of community.

Be cautious of the stories you tell yourself. Negative self-narratives can be self-sabotaging. Recognize when you're making assumptions and make an effort to **validate** your own story.

As a leader, take the time to **document** and share your company's cultural story. This helps new hires feel connected and gives everyone a shared understanding of the organization's values and history.

Purpose is not a static thing, but a living, maturing relationship that requires continuous examination and evolution as you and your circumstances change. **Use reflection** to look for the stories that shed light on purpose.

—“—
YOU WILL HAVE A
COMPANY CULTURE,
WILL IT BE WHAT YOU
WANT IT TO OR NOT?
[Episode 12 | Constantly narrating
your environment](#)
—”

YOUR LEADERSHIP STORY STARTS HERE

DIVE INTO *THE COMFY CHAIRS* PODCAST FOR INSPIRATION.

[Episode #11 We all have one](#)

[Episode #12 Constantly narrating your environment](#)

[Episode #19 Greater than myself](#)

6
how to grow



“

SOMETIMES [A LEADER'S] CONFIDENCE NEEDS TO BE, "I'M CONFIDENT THAT I CAN'T KNOW EVERYTHING. SO LET ME GET CURIOUS ABOUT THIS."

Episode 26 | Tell me more

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Effective, accountable leaders cultivate curiosity, leverage strengths, and promote continuous improvement in themselves and their teams.

We can't have a conversation about professional growth in the workplace without recognizing the role leaders play. Whether guiding the development of your employees or focusing on your own learning, if you lead, you are a learner. The tools to do this well include self-awareness, curiosity, and accountability.

It can start with studying and experimenting with how best to use your own strengths, while also practicing self-acceptance. Leveraging your natural talents and being aware of your weaknesses can help you become the best version of yourself - and the best leader you can be. This type of self-awareness is your foundation for personal, individual, and team growth.

And it's this foundation that allows you to scale growth with curiosity and creativity. These are not just "nice-to-haves" in the workplace, but essential elements of effective, fulfilling leadership. By cultivating these qualities, leaders can create more engaged, innovative, and joyful teams and organizations. These environments do more than produce great results, they allow trusting relationships to flourish.

When trust exists, accountability is a natural, positive, and empowering process. When accountability is promoted as a cornerstone of how you get work done on your team, it sheds any appearance of punishment, and can serve as an ongoing cycle clear communication, shared expectations, and continuous support. This is leadership that leverages learning and gets results.

LEAD WITH PURPOSE, GROW WITH INTENTION.
SUBSCRIBE TO THE [AS EASY AS NEWSLETTER](#) FOR
PRACTICAL, ACTIONABLE LEADERSHIP LESSONS.

Grow yourself and others.

Transparency and vulnerability from leaders is crucial. Share your own **strengths and weaknesses**, it builds credibility and trust with your team.

Accountability is a two-way street - **leaders are accountable** for creating the right environment and supporting their team, not just expecting compliance from employees. **Focus on outcomes**, not just compliance with rules. This will build a healthy, productive culture.

Creating a safe, supportive environment for curiosity to thrive is essential. **Model curiosity** and encourage your teams to ask questions, experiment, and celebrate learning.

Infusing joy and positivity into the workplace has tangible benefits: joy helps rewire the brain, boosts resilience, and fuels creativity and engagement. Intentionally create frequent **opportunities for joy**, even in small ways.

Creativity, like curiosity and joy, can help prevent burnout and maintain motivation and job satisfaction, even in demanding fields. Find ways to engage in hands-on, creative activities to **benefit well-being and support engagement**.

TURN YOUR LEARNING INTO LEADERSHIP.

LEARN MORE. LISTEN TO *THE COMFY CHAIRS* PODCAST.

[Episode #3 Focus on what's right](#)

[Episode #6 Creativity, baby!](#)

[Episode #17 Honoring your word](#)

[Episode #26 Tell me more](#)

“

WHEN WE EMPOWER PEOPLE THROUGH IDENTIFYING, UNDERSTANDING AND RELYING ON STRENGTHS, WE'RE GIVING THEM THE TOOLS TO DO THE WORK

Episode 3 | Focus on what's right

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the work is hard, but the chairs are comfy

This resource offers ideas from the 2nd season of *The Comfy Chairs* podcast to prompt self-reflection and provide practical lessons and actionable insights for leaders. It is designed to describe and support leadership that is authentic, connected, and adaptable.

At onetwentythree ltd, we believe leadership is a daily practice, rooted in trust, intentionality, and small, meaningful steps forward. Through coaching, development programs, and practical resources, we help leaders like you navigate challenges, align with their values, and create loving, joyful workplaces where people thrive.

Let's work together to help you lead better—a little every day.

L E A R N M O R E A T
O N E 2 3 L T D . C O M