BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION GUIDE

How We *Could*

The Framework to Lead Without Drama, Build Alignment, and Call Teams to Greatness

REALITY-BASED LEADERSHIP

RealityBasedLeadership.com

Contents

START HERE

A Note from Alex 3

How to Use This Guide 4

The Call to Greatness Framework 5

Before You Begin 6

THE FIVE STEPS

Step 1: Validate the Experience or Feelings 8

Step 2: Clean Up Thinking 12

Step 3: Find Your Part 16

Step 4: Know Your Role 19

Step 5: Take Next Right Action 23

PUT IT TO WORK

The *How We Could* Action Lab 27

My 30-60-90 Day Commitment 28

Closing Reflection 29

The Call to Greatness at a Glance 30

Insights and Reflections 31

Thank you for picking up this book.

Thank you for picking up ***How We Could***. This book is the product of over a decade of work with leaders and teams, and my hope in writing it was simple: to give a practical, repeatable way to move from “why we can’t” to “how we could.”

This guide is meant to be used, not just to read. Bring it to your team, get honest in the questions, and let the framework do what it's designed to do.

I’m just so fired up you’re here, and I’m grateful you’re willing to do this work.

Go Be Great,



ALEX DORR
CEO, Reality-Based Leadership

How to use this guide

This discussion guide is built to be used alongside ***How We Could***, whether you're facilitating a live book club, a team offsite, or a self-paced read-through. It follows the five steps of the Call to Greatness Framework, one section at a time.

WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN THIS GUIDE

1. **3 initial questions** to give people time for self-reflection before diving into the framework.
2. A **short framing** of the step, straight from the framework.
3. **Discussion Questions.** Each section includes a couple questions from us. Feel l free as you see fit to add your own questions to further enhance your book club experience.
4. A **Quote Reflection** space in select sections. Review quotes from the book and reflect on what it brings up.
5. A hands-on **Facilitation Activity** to bring the step to life in a group setting.

FACILITATOR TIPS

Read each section's framing aloud before opening discussion. It sets the tone for the questions that follow.

The activities are designed for 15 to 25 minutes each, except the capstone activity, that is designed to be longer.

Give people real silence before asking for volunteers on quote reflections; the best answers come after a pause.

This guide works for groups of 2 (a single accountability partner) up through full teams. Adjust the activities' pairing instructions as needed.

Five steps, move through any drama.

Love people up, then call people up, then answer the call.

LOVE PEOPLE UP

1 Validate the Experience or Feelings

Before a team member can move forward into next right action, they need to feel heard.

CALL PEOPLE UP

2 Clean Up Thinking

Separate the facts of a situation from the story we've built around it.

3 Find Your Part

This step asks each person to find their own contribution to a situation.

4 Know Your Role

Clarity on the specific role you're playing in the solution: decision-maker, consultant, or a good person to be informed.

ANSWER THE CALL

5 Take Next Right Action

Turn insight into next right action, and commit to it.

What does ***How We Could*** mean to you? Write your definition below.

What is a current goal in your team or organization that seems impossible to reach? How can you have impact in the current situation you are facing at work?

What leader impacted you the most in your career? Why?

“As a leader, you have two core responsibilities each day to your team. Love people up, and call people up to be the best version of themselves.”

ALEX DORR

1

Validate the experience or feelings.

Before a team member can move forward into next right action, they need to feel heard. This step is about validating what someone is feeling or experiencing, without agreeing that it should stay that way, and without rushing to fix it.

AS A LEADER, YOU HAVE TWO CORE RESPONSIBILITIES EACH DAY TO YOUR TEAM

1 **Love people up**

2 **Call people up to be the best version of themselves**

Discussion Questions

1 Where do you find yourself jumping to “fix it” instead of noticing that the situation may be perfect for a Call to Greatness?

2 Where have you noticed that you most often move into sympathy with a colleague’s mindset in your day-to-day?

3 Share a specific time that you drifted into sympathy with someone on your team instead of empathy and what was the result of doing so?

4 Write and practice your two goto lines to empathize with someone WITHOUT colluding about the situation.

“When leaders skip the human work and jump straight to the framework, even the most effective leadership approach in the world, applied without authentic connection, can become a form of elegant manipulation.”

ALEX DORR

What does this bring up for you? What comes to mind?

The Validation Circle

15 to 25 minutes, in pairs.

1. Pair up. Partner A shares a recent frustration at work (2 minutes) while Partner B only validates. No advice, no fixing, no collusion.

2. Partner B reflects what they heard in one sentence: “It sounds like you’re feeling _____ because _____.”

3. Switch roles and repeat.

4. Debrief as a group: What was hard about only validating without colluding? What changed in the speaker when they felt heard? Given the situation that your partner shared with you, now that they feel heard, what is one thing you could say to them to get them moving towards next right action? (examples on page 33 to 34 of the book)

NOTES FROM THE DEBRIEF

Clean Up Thinking

Separate the facts of a situation from the story we've built around it.

Drama grows in the space between what happened and the story that we make up and believe about what happened. This step gives leaders a way to help people untangle circumstances from the story.

Discussion Questions

1 What's a story you've been telling yourself and believing about a difficult situation at work that, on reflection, might not be the full picture?

2 Alex writes that without changing anything, the single step of ‘cleaning up thinking’ changed everything. When you hear that, what does that mean to you?

3 Alex shares with us the importance of having an “exit line” and on page 69, he shares several examples. Create your goto exit line below.

4 Where might you see yourself having to use this exit line when a conversation gets uncomfortable? Why?

TOOL

Begin the Edit Your Story

Write all of your stressful thoughts about the situation as you first thought them. Then keep only what you know for sure.

ONE. WRITE OUT THE ENTIRE STORY YOU HAVE ABOUT THE UNPREFERRED REALITY

Completing the Edit Your Story

5-10 minutes. Use the tool on page 14.

1. Now reread your story, sentence-by-sentence, asking yourself the questions: **What do I know for sure? Can I really know that is true?**
2. Cross out anything that you don't know for sure, leaving only the facts. This includes judgments, assignments of motive, speculation, etc. Feelings stay, however be sure to check the stories you've written that may be fueling the feelings.
3. Now reread your story to yourself - with only the reality that remains. This is the situation, but now with clean thinking.
4. **Now that you have cleaned up your thinking, what are 2-3 things that you could do to help improve this situation? What is the next right action that you could take? Write those ideas below.**

3

Find Your Part

If you can't account for your part in the situation, you can't make intentional choices to change it.

THE FOUR FACTORS OF PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Commitment **Resiliency** **Ownership**

Continuous learning

Discussion Questions

1 Alex explains that accountability is a mindset not a skillset. When you hear this, what do you think? What is your definition of accountability?

2 Share an example about a time when you enabled your team or someone on your team and it led to poor results or teamwork.

3 What was the situation? What was the result?

4 The four factors of personal accountability are commitment, resiliency, ownership, and continuous learning. Which of these factors comes most naturally to you at work and which one do you have to work harder at and why?

“Every time you lower a standard, you set a new standard.”

ALEX DORR

What does this bring up for you? What comes to mind? How have you seen this playout in your organization or in previous places you’ve worked?

FACILITATION ACTIVITY

Exercise in Accountability

1. Think about a recent problem or issue you had at work that caused you or others to move into blame or finger-pointing.
2. What was your part in what happened? How did you personally contribute to or detract from the results?
3. Now share with your partner what the problem was and what part you played. Remember to use “I” phrases (I chose, I assumed, I did, I decided etc.)

4

Know Your Role

Once people find their part, they may need clarity on the specific role they're playing in the solution: Decision-maker, Consultant, or A Good Person to be Informed.

Nearly all conflict in the workplace can be traced to a fundamental lack of clarity in three critical areas: goals, roles, and procedures.

ROLE ONE

Decision-maker

ROLE TWO

Consultant

ROLE THREE

A Good Person to be Informed

Discussion Questions

1 **The three roles, Decision-maker, Consultant, and A Good Person to be Informed, seem simple in theory. Where have you seen role ambiguity cause the most conflict on a team you've been part of?**

2 **This chapter mentions that most 'Decisions' are currently being made outside the four metaphorical walls of your organization. Who or what are making 'decisions' that greatly influence the current changes and strategies being pursued? Make a list.**

3 **Have you ever spent significant energy trying to influence or change a decision that wasn't yours to make? What did that cost you, and what might have been possible if you'd known your role clearly?**

Non-Negotiables Brainstorm

15 to 25 minutes, in small groups or pairs. Bring flip chart paper or a markerboard.

1. Get into small groups or work with a partner, spend 15 minutes, and brainstorm a list of your non-negotiables at work (think systems, software, required training, safety etc.). Write your list of non-negotiables on chart paper.

2. Now, for each non-negotiable item that you wrote down, ask yourself this question: is this non-negotiable a preference or does it support the potential of the business and who we serve? Does it eliminate future decisions and create efficiency? A true non-negotiable is a decision that has been made once so that people don't have to make that same decision thousands of times.

3. Create your master list, have each group or partner share their list of non-negotiables. As a whole group, combine your ideas into one master list of organizational non-negotiables. As you combine, look for duplicates, gaps, and items that aren't truly non-negotiables.

4. **End by asking your group, "where could having clearer non-negotiables free us up to spend less energy deciding, and more energy doing the work that matters?"**

OUR MASTER LIST

TOOL

Goals, Roles, Procedures

Nearly all conflict in the workplace can be traced to a fundamental lack of clarity in three critical areas. Name the situation, then get clear on all three.

THE SITUATION

Goals

What result are we actually after? Are they clear and measureable?

Roles

Who is the decision-maker, who is a consultant, who is a good person to be informed? Are people playing the right roles for what the situation merits?

Procedures

How will we work, decide, and communicate? What are our 7-10 non-negotiables that support getting the bulk of the work done efficiently?

5

Take Next Right Action

Turn insight into next right action, and commit to it.

THREE TOOLS FROM THE BOOK

SBAR

Overviewing the issue at a high-level and offering initial next steps to problem-solve it.

Thinking Inside-the-Box

Find ideas to proceed given the constraints, circumstances or excuses in the way.

Negative Brainstorming

Capturing a list of fears, concerns, unspoken worries or resistance and prioritizing how to move forward anyway.

Discussion Questions

1 Of the three tools, SBAR, Thinking Inside-the-Box, and Negative Brainstorming, which one do you wish you'd had access to earlier in your career? Why? Which one do you see yourself using first with your team? How could it help your team?

2 Alex writes that the final step when using all these tools is to ask for commitments. Who is doing what by when? What are ways you will hold yourself and your team members accountable when using the tools?

3 Write down one specific drama-pattern in your daily workflow that you could invite the SBAR tool. Think about those, “Hey, do you have a minute?” interruptions.

4 What challenge, issue or goal that is stuck for progress could benefit from a Thinking Inside-the-Box or Negative Brainstorming session with your team?

TOOL

SBAR

Bring a problem forward with a recommendation attached. Fill this in before the conversation, not during it.

S Situation

What is happening right now? Outline the problem in one sentence.

B Background

What is the relevant background and how is it linked to strategy?

A Assessment

What are the facts, data, expertise, relevant information not opinions

R Recommendations

What are 2 or more recommendations to move forward? Be sure to included the cost/benefit or any tradeoffs, if possible

“The power of a leader isn’t what you tell people, but what you get them reflecting on.”

ALEX DORR

Where does your team often get caught arguing with reality and blaming external factors for why they can’t make progress on a goal?

TOOL

Thinking Inside-the-Box

GOAL

CONSTRAINTS	SOLUTIONS “How we could...”	CONSTRAINTS

The *How We Could* Action Lab

Plan for longer than the other activities.

1. As a pair or group, revisit one real, current challenge someone is willing to bring to the table.
2. Walk it through all five steps live: Validate the Experience or Feelings, Clean Up Thinking, Find Your Part, Know Your Role, and Take Next Right Action.
3. Use the tools found in the book as you walk through all five steps: Edit Your Story (page 14), Accounting For (page 79) Goals, Roles, Procedures (page 22), SBAR (page 25),Thinking Inside-the-Box (page 26), and/or Negative Brainstorming (page 187)
4. Each participant then completes their own 30-60-90 Day Commitment (space provided on the next page) based on their own real challenge, not necessarily the one discussed live.
5. **Close by having each person read their one-sentence commitment aloud to the group.**

THE CHALLENGE ON THE TABLE

My 30-60-90 Day Commitment

One sentence. What will you do, by when, and how will your team know?

30 DAYS

60 DAYS

90 DAYS

MY ONE SENTENCE, READ ALOUD

You've worked through all five steps

You've completed a full journey through the Call to Greatness Framework: Love People Up, Clean Up the Thinking, Find Your Part, Know Your Role, and Take Next Right Action. Use the space below to capture what's changing for you, and what you want to remember the next time drama shows up.

What's one "why we can't" you're ready to turn into a "how we could"?

Who will you share this with?

The Call to Greatness Framework *at a glance.*

When your team hits an unpreferred reality, great leaders don't argue with it or wish it away. They guide people into the space for impact, the deliberate space between the reality and the ideal future. These are the five steps to get there, in order.

UNPREFERRED REALITY | **THE SPACE FOR IMPACT** | **IDEAL FUTURE**

1

LOVE PEOPLE UP FIRST

Validate the experience or feelings

"I see you, I hear you, and I acknowledge this is challenging." Absorb the frustration, then point to the choices. Validate the feelings, not the drama.

Hold space for them to feel their feelings in the unpreferred reality.

TOOL
Ackowledge feelings without colluding

2

EDIT YOUR STORY

Clean up thinking

Write down every thought, then ask what you know for sure. Cross out anything you can't verify. What remains is the reality of the problem, almost always less harsh than the story.

"What do you know for sure?"

TOOL
Edit Your Story

3

OWN YOUR PART

Find your part

Shift from what others have done to how I'm contributing to the problem. Answer in "I" statements: I chose, I assumed, I avoided. No "we," "they," or "them."

"What is your part in it?"

TOOL
Accounting For

4

SETTLE INTO YOUR ROLE

Know your role

Ensure you are not playing the wrong role for what the situation requires. Three roles that all provide equal value: Decision-Maker, Consultant, or Good Person to Be Informed. Settle into the right one.

"Are you playing the right role for what this requires?"

TOOL
The Alignment & Buy-in Decision Table

5

ANSWER THE CALL

Take next right action

With this clarity, don't hide out behind problem identification. Time to step into confident next right action. Pick your tool and move forward given the risks and circumstances ahead.

"What is the next right action?"

TOOLS
SBAR · Thinking Inside-the-Box · Negative Brainstorming

STEP 5 · WHEN TO USE EACH TOOL

SBAR

USE IT WHEN

You need to outline a problem at a high level and land on initial recommendations. Turns venting into a clear ask: Situation, Background, Assessment, Recommendations.

Thinking Inside-the-Box

USE IT WHEN

You're moving forward despite real constraints, competing priorities, or limited resources. Name the goal and the walls, then find what's possible within them.

Negative Brainstorming

USE IT WHEN

Progress is blocked by fears, concerns, ambiguity, or resistance to change. Surface every worry, rename each as a risk, then plan for the biggest ones.

Given this reality, what would *great* look like? Then go be great.

Insights and Reflections

Now, go be *great*.

While every frustration your team encounters may not need intervention, every frustration **does** have a call to greatness embedded in it. Great leadership isn't about applying these steps and tools rigidly; it's about reading the humanness of the moment accurately and responding appropriately.

REALITY-BASED LEADERSHIP

© 2026 Reality-Based Leadership, LLC. All rights reserved.