Moral imperative is about meaningfulness in life and work. It consists of a strong internal commitment to accomplish something of significant value. In education, this is often expressed as learning for all students. The new moral imperative, exhibited in this book, is deep learning for all students. Breakthrough means achieving dramatic results never before accomplished. The reason that I combine moral imperative and uplifting leadership into one phenomenon is that one without the other is empty. Moral imperative is meaningless if it is just on paper and not being enacted. Uplifting leadership needs a purpose; moral imperative involving identity, mastery, creativity, and connectedness fuels the journey. The tension is that moral imperative is sometimes uttered without mobilizing people to enact it. Or people get active without firm goals.

The goal of leadership, then, is to help cause breakthroughs by being part of a process that uplifts large numbers of people. It is to
make deep change happen and be meaningful to individuals and the group. To do any good, meaning must have a collective face. In this chapter I want to do two things: first, to define deep meaning and motivation in relation to breakthrough moral imperative, and second, to show how uplifting leadership fits in. This combination is the key overall disposition. Then I will show how the next four tensions—content and process, lead and learn, seeing students as change agents and protégés, and feeding and being fed by the system—turn essential leadership into indelible leadership.

**BREAKTHROUGH MORAL IMPERATIVE AND DEEP WORK**

There are very few things as basic to human nature as wondering about the meaning of daily existence. So let’s start with the fundamentals. Leadership is about helping people find meaning. The action verb here is *to motivate*. We need a succinct and relatively complete definition of what constitutes “motivation for deep learning.”

Dan Pink (2009) got us off to a strong start in his book, *Drive*. Pink found that the combination of purpose, mastery, and a degree of autonomy or self-direction was related to higher performance. To this I would add *connectedness*. It is fundamentally human to want to be part of creating something worthwhile with others.

Now we come to the hard part. Mobilizing moral imperative. It would be great to say that if we stoked people’s passion we would get lots of new, deep meaning. However, if individuals don’t have palpable passion, you could hardly get it by cajoling or otherwise urging them to *be more passionate*. Or take the flip side and ask whether passion is always a good thing. In the Preface, I mentioned Cal Newport’s (2016) latest book, *Deep Work*. Newport’s previous book was called *So Good They Can’t Ignore You* (2012). He shows, for example, that passion without skill can be dangerous, which makes perfect sense when you think about it. He also argues that if you don’t have fire in your belly, it may be less helpful to
try to fake it (or join a cult) than it would be to develop new, useful skills, thereby discovering your own new passions.

The leadership implications are profound. Yes, leverage passion where you find it (and in some cases, maybe tone it down), but mostly give people (e.g., students) new experiences that lead them to realize passions they did not know they had. Maybe certain people are not passionate at all, but being human, most of us are prone to be drawn into something that is personally and socially meaningful—something in which we could become deeply immersed. In this way, people find new meaning relative to their existence (after all, we are talking about depth).

Locating and activating moral imperative is at the heart of answering Goffee and Jones’s (2015) provocative question: Why should anyone work here? Great question for the would-be indelible leader! It won’t be sufficient for the leader to convince herself or himself that people should want to work here; rather, the litmus test is that many people become or end up wanting to do important deep things together. Goffee and Jones did not say “let’s start with a strategic plan and attract people to it”; rather, they asked a more basic question: “What will attract people to want to spend their energies in making something worthwhile happen?” When people work in organizations that stand for something specific and valuable, they come to have a sense of identity and commitment to what they are doing. Indeed, people become aware of the significance of the work. As one senior executive expressed it in the Goffee and Jones study, people become conscious of the future, ready “to take positive steps to ensure the permanence and longevity of the company” (p. 105), or perhaps more accurately, people
become committed to working for a collective cause that is equally individually fulfilling.

Deep work and indelible leadership are intertwined, for obvious reasons. When work is deep it has a greater chance of lasting. The challenge, as Cal Newport (2016) shows, is that deep work is increasingly rare. Newport defines deep work as follows:

Professional activities performed in a state of distraction-free concentration that push your cognitive capacities to their limit. These efforts create new value, improve your skill, and are hard to replicate. (p. 3)

We won’t be purist in following this definition; for example, who can be fully distraction-free these days? And my only quibble with the definition is that deep work also requires serious emotional capacities. But you get the point. Deep work will require reducing distractors and mobilizing concentration of the group on the moral task at hand. The flip side, “shallow work,” is easily recognized in the age of superficiality that I referred to earlier. Newport (2016) puts it this way: “Non-cognitively demanding . . . tasks [are] often performed while distracted. These efforts tend not to create much new value in the world and are easy to replicate” (p. 6).

Newport (2016) supplies a truckload of examples that deep work is becoming more and more rare “at exactly the same time it is becoming increasingly valuable in our economy” (p. 14), the latter being my point about the timeliness of indelible leadership. Even when one deliberately tries to track down examples of deep learning, as Mehta and Fine (2015) did, one comes up rather empty. Without question schooling, as we know it, has become increasingly superficial at the
very time that depth is required. Reversing this trend is the goal of uplifting leadership.

**UPLIFTING LEADERSHIP**

In the previous section, we saw traces of what uplifting leadership entails. Essentially, it is to mobilize deep action, meaning, and impact on the part of large numbers of individuals and the collectivity. As mentioned earlier, Andy Hargreaves, Alan Boyle, and Alma Harris (2014) have focused on the very topic of uplifting leadership in their study of extraordinary performance in three sectors: business, education, and sports. Here I want to highlight only the concept of uplifting leadership. In education there are many forces keeping things the way they are—traditional and ineffective for the times. Later on I will introduce Bruce Dixon’s (2015) powerful phrase *legacy pedagogy* and add my own *legacy cultures* to make the point that the status quo is proving enormously resistant to unseat, even though there are many who strongly desire transformation. In big change the problem is that people are not confident in a new radical alternative, partly because they cannot imagine what it might look like and do, and also because they do not have the capacity to pull it off. Our six leadership dispositions, along with the allure of the 6Cs of helping oneself and humanity, I believe are powerful and timely enough to disrupt and redefine the status quo as a new state of affairs. Deep leaders attempt to uplift themselves and others for exactly that purpose. The first steps will be the hardest, but the good news is that there are a surprising number of takers. The push factors (a bad status quo) and the pull factors (exciting pedagogy, global competencies, enabling leadership) form the seeds of a perfect storm.

Timing, the future is now! A profound need conjures up a job description: Wanted, leaders willing to throw themselves into the deep end while they save others and themselves!
I am forecasting an abrupt and deep change in education. Rushkoff (2016) puts it well:

Big data doesn’t tell us what a person could do. It tells us what a person will likely do on the past actions of other people. The big rub is that invention of genuinely new products, of game changers, never comes from refining our analysis of existing consumer trends but from stoking the ingenuity of our innovators. (p. 43, italics in original)

Deep leadership enters the arena of what humans could do if they mobilized collectively. In this book we will find the innovators in the deep end of learning, and many of them are students open to doing things never before conceived. Deep leadership is not about finding things that were always there; it is about creating things that were never imagined. Once identified, once shaped and reshaped, they will form the basis of a new era of radical change in how and what humans learn.

The rest of this book equips you with the mindset and tools you will need to be uplifting in a sea of change: master content and process, lead and listen in equal measure, see students as change agents and protégés, feed and be fed by the system, make yourself essential and dispensable—these are the ingredients of deep leadership. Develop these qualities in yourself and others and you will make a mark of deep improvement while you lead—one that lasts and grows far beyond your tenure.
1. Reflect on the question “Why should anyone work here?” in relation to your organization. Identify a couple of actions you could take that would make people want to invest their time and energy in your organization.

2. To what extent is your organization a place where you and others feel safe to do things differently, fail, learn from failure, and get better as a result? How could you model in public being a lead learner?

3. Have a preliminary discussion around the question “What is deep learning for your group?” With the group, list the opportunities that people have to experience deep learning and to witness deep learning in the students or adults they work with.

4. Realize that you are entering a period of radical innovations. Be open to being surprised and to surprising others with your explorations.
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