

THE DIAGNOSIS OF LEADERSHIP



In This Chapter

- **The Words That Broke Me**
What happens when life interrupts your perfect plan?
- **The Illusion of Control**
Why most leaders are addicted to certainty—and what it costs them.
- **Letting Go of the Fight**
From battlefield to stillness: discovering the paradox of power

-----Chapter Preview -----

June 2022. The sky was clear. Business thriving. Wedding six weeks away. I was coaching top executives to navigate uncertainty with clarity. I thought I knew leadership.

Until the words that ended that version of me:
“Brain cancer. Lung tumors. Fifty-fifty you’ll see Christmas.”

www.the-liberation-leader.com

Under fluorescent hum, everything I'd built went silent. The expert became the patient. The guide became the one being led. For the first time in decades, I had no answers. I wasn't making a decision—a decision was making me. We walked to a nearby lake and sat beneath a tree for two hours. Stillness. Shock. The world didn't end—but the world as I knew it did.

Across the next two nights I fell through a private dark. The body hurt; the deeper wound was identity. Who am I if I'm not leading? Succeeding? In control? Then something unexpected: the part of me clinging to control began to dissolve. Pain gave way to presence. Meaninglessness to mystery. A stillness arrived—not passive, but powerful.

The shift wasn't an idea or a strategy. It was a cellular knowing. A power beyond logic swept in—lifting, cleansing, re-ordering. I didn't understand it. I trusted it.

This wasn't surrender as defeat. It was surrender as awakening.

I stopped being a victim of circumstance and became radically accountable for my being. The clarity that came wasn't adrenaline; it was presence. If someone had asked me to lead a nation in that hour, I would have said yes—not to prove, but to serve. When you meet truth that deeply, masks fall. Leadership didn't die in that room. It was reborn.

“Leadership isn't control. It's coherence—with yourself, your essence, and something larger than you. From that alignment, the path unfolds.”

That day became a threshold. On one side stood the version of me who believed he was leading life. On the other stood the man about to learn what life—and leadership—truly meant.

We don't talk enough about how leaders process personal crisis. We valorize the strategist, the decision-maker, the visionary. But what happens when the visionary can't see the next step? What happens when the map is blank?

This chapter is not just about illness. It's about the illusion of control and what becomes possible when it shatters. It's about redefining leadership not as dominance over the future, but as presence in the now—because when everything falls away, you don't lose yourself; you meet yourself.

Night One

The first night after the diagnosis, I didn't sleep. I didn't move much. I simply lay in the darkness, my thoughts swirling like smoke around a fire that wouldn't light. Martina tried to comfort me, but what do you say when the person you love has been handed a 50% expiration date?

The mind becomes a whirlwind in crisis. Every corner of consciousness fills with questions. One moment, I imagined fighting and winning. The next, I imagined my funeral. A carousel of survival instinct and existential dread.

But somewhere between 2 and 4 a.m., something else arrived. A presence. Quiet, grounded, spacious. Not a solution, but a softening. Not an answer, but an invitation. It asked no questions. It offered no promises. But it reminded me of something ancient inside me—something I had touched before.

In that moment, I remembered a night long ago. I was 30. My first marriage was collapsing. The dream I had chased—of a perfect family, a shining career, a clear path—was falling apart.

On a business flight from London to Miami—bound for the international boat show—I met the Welsh woman I would marry. I was en route to lead an Oxford MBA project, exploring whether

Cosworth Formula One Engineering could enter the marine engine market. It felt fated. Our son arrived as I sat my final exams. The horizon seemed certain then: a Fortune 500 stage, waiting with my name on it.

Pressure cracked me open. The first heartbreak—of family, of identity—didn't end me; it ended an illusion. I stopped treating life as a performance to control and began meeting it as a mirror. In that mirror I saw values I'd hidden, fears I'd curated, truths I'd postponed.

What shifted was subtle but seismic: I moved from reacting to choosing—responding with consciousness instead of reflex. From that pivot, a different path became visible: not the ego's chase for safety and applause, but a purpose-guided journey of learning where events are invitations to upgrade awareness. This is the axis of this book: everything that follows turns around one decisive hinge.

Here Viktor Frankl's hard-won wisdom becomes a practical compass for leadership. An Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist, Frankl was deported to Auschwitz and other camps; he lost his parents, his wife, almost every outward anchor a human can lose. Amid forced labor, starvation, and disease, he discerned a stark truth: those who could still locate meaning—however fragile—could endure the unendurable. He named his approach logotherapy: the conviction that the human being's primary drive is the will to meaning, pursued through purposeful work or creativity, through love that binds us beyond circumstance, and through the courage to face adversity without surrendering dignity. His insight is operational, not abstract:

“Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response.”

That space is the birthplace of responsibility and freedom. Responsibility, then, is not a weight but a doorway—an inner stance that says: I may not change the conditions, but I can choose the person I become within them.

As I released the old model—control, image, speed—and leaned into reality with curiosity, life stopped feeling like a verdict and started operating like a curriculum. What I once called “miracles” were often the natural consequences of presence: clearer timing, truer decisions, unlikely support.

The problem, I discovered, is rarely the problem; the real issue is our relationship to it. In fear, the ego drives relentless efficiency toward the wrong destination: running faster toward a false North Star. In purpose, awareness widens. Options appear. Teams breathe. Performance strengthens because trust and truth are finally allowed into the room.

This is the genesis of a Liberation Leader: naming what is without blame, integrating perspectives instead of defending positions, anchoring choices in what truly matters, and accepting full authorship of one’s response. It is not passivity. It is disciplined acceptance—an operating rhythm that converts difficulty into development. The external facts may not shift overnight, but your inner architecture does; and with it, your leadership becomes a conduit for wiser action, steadier culture, and outcomes that serve more than the ego’s timetable.

I choose to treat life as a learning journey: to discover my purpose, to give my gifts, to serve what is larger than me. Held this way, reality expands my horizon and sharpens my radar for opportunity. Solutions that lift the whole system begin to surface. And the key is simple and demanding: radically accept what is—and respond from purpose.

Everything in these pages orients around these essential questions—the key to understanding and responding to our life:

**Do you live at war with life or
are you learning to live with it?**

Is your story written by chance, or rewritten by choice?

**Do you measure your life by what happened to you, or by
who you became through it?**

**Is leadership about controlling outcomes, or about
influencing meaning?**

Pivot — When Power Changes Shape

I had always equated control with safety. But control made people quiet, and quiet teams do not tell you where the ice is thin. Coherence felt different. It was not force; it was listening until the signal was clean and the next move was obvious.

The old loop—control → pressure → more control—was impressive on paper and exhausting in a soul. The new loop—presence → coherence → clean action—felt like removing a weight vest I didn't know I wore.

I stopped negotiating with facts. I named them. Naming released energy I'd spent performing certainty.

Night Two

The second night after the diagnosis felt different. I had moved through shock. Now came silence. Spacious, raw, honest silence. I