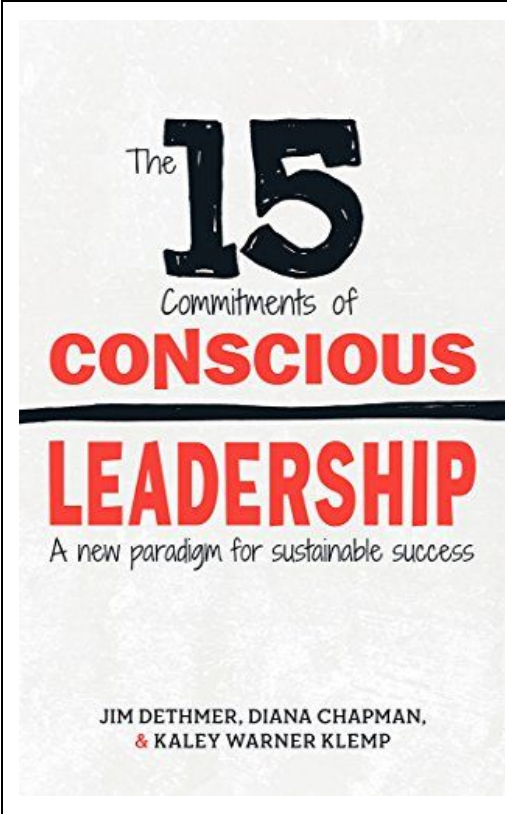


Favorite Quote:

“All drama in leadership and life is caused by the need to be right. Letting go of that need is a radical shift all great leaders make.”

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|  | <p>Summary: The 15 Commitments of Conscious Leadership (hereafter “15CCL”) is a 326-page earthquake of a book that has the potential to reshape the psychological landscape of companies and people.</p> <p>Drawing from a tapestry of Eastern and Western philosophies, 15CCL deftly describes how our limbic system and ego can hijack our emotions, thoughts and behaviors. What’s at risk? Massive harm to ourselves and those around us, at work, or otherwise.</p> <p>The most important question for us to learn is: “Am I <i>above</i> the line, or <i>below</i> the line?” If you are above the line, you are <i>open, curious, and committed to learning</i>. If you are below the line, you are <i>closed, defensive, and committed to being right</i>.</p> <p>Step 1 is learning to identify—and acknowledge—when we are above or below the line. If we are below the line, we need to learn how to manage that within us.</p> <p>Commitment #1: Taking Radical Responsibility for the circumstances of our life, and supporting others to take full responsibility for their lives. The goal: eradicate blame, victimhood, and martyrdom.</p> <p>All of the subsequent 14 commitments are built with Commitment #1 as the foundation. It is the linchpin, the crux. Everything starts here.</p> |
|--|--|

“Our judgments about the world tell us a great deal about ourselves and very little about the world. They reveal something about our reactions, beliefs, listening filters, unconscious habits or expectations.”

Jim Dethmer



Diana Chapman



Kaley Warner Klemp



Above the Line vs. Below the Line

The first meta-skill that we have to learn is identifying:

Am I above the line (ATL), or below the line (BTL) right now?

Personally, I've noticed that I can dip below the line at least a few times per day (that I'm aware of!), and when I observe myself in this defensive, ego-driven state, I simply say to myself, often out loud: "*I am below the line right now.*" This acknowledgement is key because the 15 commitments can't be fulfilled while in a below the line state. For the 15 commitment seeds to grow, they must be planted in ATL soil.

"Leaders often have a difficult time telling the difference between a threat to the body's physical survival and an imagined threat to the ego or identity."

ABOVE THE LINE

OPEN CURIOUS COMMITTED TO LEARNING

BELOW THE LINE

CLOSED DEFENSIVE COMMITTED TO BEING RIGHT

Key quotes from Introduction

- "*Knowing when you are below the line is more important than being below the line.*"
 - "*In our experience, great leaders pay more attention to how conversations are occurring than to what is being talked about.*"
 - "*In our experience, conscious leaders are rare. Most people live life largely unconscious in the habitual trance of their personality, their regret, and anger about the past, and their hope, fear, and greed about the future.*"
-

The 15 Commitments

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| 1. Taking radical responsibility | 6. Practicing integrity | 11. Sourcing approval, control, security |
| 2. Learning through curiosity | 7. Generating appreciation | 12. Having enough of everything |
| 3. Feeling all feelings | 8. Excelling in your zone of genius | 13. Experiencing the world as an ally |
| 4. Speaking candidly | 9. Living a life of play and rest | 14. Creating win for all solutions |
| 5. Eliminating gossip | 10. Exploring the opposite | 15. Being the resolution |

1: Taking radical responsibility

Overview: commitment 1 is about taking full responsibility for your life. What you have, at this moment, you've attracted by the person you've become. It's time to open the nearest window and chuck blame, guilt and shame onto the street. No more excuses.



Meanwhile, commitment 1 is also about supporting *others* to take full responsibility for their lives.

If we do these two things, then we can avoid the [drama triangle](#) in which people play different roles:

- The victim complains
- The villain blame
- The hero alleviates

We learn to see ourselves as co-creators of all experiences. Toxic fear still exists, but we've had the reigns in our hands the whole time.

5 Different Levels of Motivation

The authors observe five different ways that leaders motivate their teams. Great leaders motivate from levels 3, 4 and 5.

1. Toxic fear: blame, shame, guilt
2. Extrinsic: money, title, perks
3. **Intrinsic: learning, fulfillment, autonomy**
4. **Play, creativity, expression**
5. **Love**

2: Learning through curiosity

Overview: commitment 2 is about adopting a growth mindset to expand self-awareness by learning. Curiosity is the name of the game. The authors highlight our tendency to “drift” below the line—which is to be expected. Conscious leaders will notice this as it's happening, then ask themselves: “Am I willing to *shift* back toward consciousness?”

How does one shift? A few suggestions are offered:

1. Breathe: Take 4 deep breaths—count to 4 on each inhale and exhale (32 seconds)
2. Posture: when you notice you've shifted, change your posture by leaning in
3. Wonder: challenge yourself to embrace “open-ended curiosity” and embrace wonder

“Current research on leadership shows that over the course of our career, four competencies trump all others as the greatest predictors of sustained success: 1) self-awareness, 2) learning agility, 3) communication, and 4) influence.”

My favorite part of this chapter talks about “wonder questions” which help us explore the unknown and letting go of control:

- *I wonder what outrageous customer success would look like?*

DBT VENTURES

- I wonder what I could learn today that I could share for everyone's benefit?
- I wonder how we could get more done in less time?
- I wonder what questions would get us to the answers we really need to know from customers?
- I wonder what the person I don't get along with could teach me?
- I wonder what my biggest blindspot is based off where I've historically fallen short?



“Though conscious leaders have a good grasp on what they know and are interested in what they don't know, they are inexorably drawn to what they don't know they don't know.”

3: Feeling all feelings

Overview: this commitment encourages emotional openness while allowing our emotions to run their course. For those who have read the wildly popular book [The Untethered Soul](#) by Michael Singer, this chapter has a lot of the same undertones. Perhaps over-simplistically, the authors suggest that there are “five primary emotions” of anger, fear, sadness, joy and sexual feelings—all of which we must learn to identify (psychologically and physically), experience it fully, release it completely, and learn from it quickly.

“Feelings are resisted and often repressed because they're viewed as a distraction to good decision-making and leadership.”

When our minds get involved with challenging emotions, they create an endless recycling loop rather than release. To prevent this from happening, one technique is to vocalize the sound of the emotion:

- Anger: “GRRRRRRRR!!!”
- Fear: “AGGGHHHHHH!!!”

- Joy: “WOOOHHHOOO!!”
- Sadness: “Awwwww. . . .”

Key insights

- “In her book *My Stroke of Insight*, Harvard-trained and published neuroanatomist, Jill Bolte-Taylor says that emotions last **at most ninety seconds.**” — like tempests in a teapot, we must learn to ride them out without letting them spiral into our psyche.
- Each emotion contains its own message of wisdom:
 - Anger: something is not, or no longer, of service; something must be changed or destroyed to regain alignment; a boundary has been crossed, and/or a boundary needs to be set; it’s time to cut and destroy.
 - Fear: something important needs to be known; what don’t I know? What are we missing? Something new wants to be learned.
 - Sadness: something needs to be let go, said goodbye to; “sadness is the energy of loss;” what should I say goodbye to?
 - Joy: something needs to be celebrated, acknowledged and appreciated; who deserves recognition?
 - Sexual feelings: the energy of creativity and creation; something new wants to be birthed or created; this is related to sexual desire, but a different emotion.

Sex and the workplace? The last bullet point made me uncomfortable. Sexual feelings and the workplace are rarely discussed, and seem like a HR minefield. But then I remembered reading about this concept before: [Chapter 11](#) of *Think and Grow Rich*, by Napoleon Hill. If you decide to explore, buckle your seatbelt.


4: Speaking candidly

Overview: Commit to saying what is true for you. Avoid the temptation to withhold, posture, and manipulate. By suppressing the truth—especially when it comes to giving feedback—you jeopardize others via “ruinous empathy.” For most companies, there is not much outright lying, so the real challenge is encouraging people to *not withhold* their facts, thoughts, and feelings.

“The team that sees reality the best wins.” —Jack Welch

Top insights

- “Candor is one of the greatest antidotes to boredom.”
- “One mark of a healthy culture is employee engagement, and in our experience, engagement and candid are directly correlated.”
- “Our judgments about the world tell us a great deal about ourselves, and very little about the world. They reveal something about our reactions, beliefs, listening filters, unconscious habits or expectations.”
- Choosing to reveal is choosing to connect.

- Meta skill: Notice yourself making a judgment about someone or something?
 - >> Pause
 - >> Observe
 - >> Ask a question
- “Withholding leads to low energy in the leader and relational disconnection in the team.”
- 3 circles  of candor
 - Truthfulness (vs. lying)
 - Openness (vs. withholding)
 - Awareness (vs. uninformed)
 - Or “TOA”
- Speaking “unarguably” means revealing a thought, a feeling or a sensation.
- “Underneath all withholding is fear. We choose to withhold because we’re afraid of losing ACS, ie Approval, Control, Security.
- “We believe love-based organizations win over fear-based organizations.”
- Conscious listening occurs at 3 levels:
 - Head (content): what both sides are thinking
 - Heart (emotions): what both sides are feeling
 - Gut (base desire): what needs/desires are being expressed



5: Eliminate gossip

Overview: gossip is both dangerous and prevalent. Gossip is defined as speaking about others with negative intent in a way the speaker wouldn't repeat if the subject were in the room. It is worth eradicating from a company because "creative energy and collaboration can't exist while gossip is present." One way to remove gossip is by using the clearing method (expressing all unexpressed thoughts, feelings, judgments, desires) in which the *facts* are separated from the *story*.



Key insights:

- There are many "benefits" to gossiping which keep the rumor mill turning:
 - Make others wrong (one-upmanship)
 - Gain validation
 - Control others
 - Get attention
 - Divert attention
 - Avoid conflict (the most insidious reason to gossip, imho)
 - Avoid feeling and/or expressing authentic emotions
 - Create pseudo alliances
- The clearing model is a pretty awesome framework for addressing conflict:
 - Affirm a meaningful relationship
 - Establish a time to talk
 - The specific facts are. . .
 - I make up a story that. . .
 - I feel. . .
 - My part in this. . . (this is really the special sauce, imho, which requires radical ownership)
 - And I specifically want. . .

[now the other person responds]

 - What I hear you saying. .
 - After reflecting, ask "Is that accurate?"
 - Is there more?
 - Are you clear about this?

6: Practicing integrity

Overview: integrity is described as a *practice* more than a value in the sense we commit to 1) acknowledging all authentic feelings, 2) expressing the unarguable truth, 3) keeping agreements, and 4) taking 100% responsibility. An "integrity" breach is anything that interrupts or blocks the flow of energy. It takes effort to hold back feelings, thoughts, wants and desires. This chapter really nails the concept of "impeccable agreements" which entails:

1. Making clear agreements
2. Keeping agreements
3. Renegotiating agreements
4. Cleaning up broken agreements

Clear agreements are basically a combination of SMART goals + buy-in from all parties + keeping track. Pretty basic stuff, but that doesn't mean it's easy.

“Many people are not impeccable about agreements because they begin by making agreements they never plan to keep. In fact, we have noticed that this is the primary reason people get out of integrity with agreements in the workplace.”

Key insights

- On pages 166-168 there is an “Integrity Inventory” which I recommend looking at. It is an exhaustive list of 42 questions to prompt you to identify gaps in your integrity today.
- “Integrity is not defined here as conforming to a moral or ethical code, but rather as facilitating wholeness and congruence.”
- This chapter is basically a combination of commitment #1, #3, #4 and #6.

7: Generating appreciation

Overview: this commitment is about opening up to both giving and receiving appreciation. We explore the dynamics of entitlement (when preference turns into expectation), and the inner critic (deflection or dismissal of appreciation).

Key insights

- “As you become a master of appreciation, you can make more and more refined distinctions, combining experience with the wonder of fresh eyes. The capacity for specificity becomes part of the delight.”
- “You notice what you are looking for.”
- “Research continues to show that a ratio of approximately five appreciations for every one criticism comment is the optimal ratio for strong relationships.” [amazingly, the authors fail to cite a source for this reference. I found [this research article](#) from *Harvard Business Review*]

The 4 Elements of Masterful Appreciation

1. *Sincerity*: keep in authentic
2. *Unarguable truth*: objective observation
3. *Specificity*: avoid ambiguity - get specific
4. *Succinct language*: less is more

Reference: the authors suggest we check out HopeLab.org/culture and check out their “[Check-In Deck](#)” which has a collection of group activities and communication exercises.

8: Excelling in your zone of genius

Overview: you are magnificent. Not at everything, but *something*. Commitment 8 is about finding and expressing what you are uniquely magnificent at, and inspiring others to do the same. There are actually 4 zones (incompetence, competence, excellent, genius). Most high-performers get stuck in “excellence” which is the proverbial career comfort zone which pays well but gradually sucks the energy, creativity and passion from them.

Zones Of Genius

Genius

- What work do you so love doing that it doesn't seem like work?
- Which aspects of your work generate the highest ratio of positive results compared to time spent?

Excellent

- What do you consistently get positive feedback about in your work and life?
- What do you do better than just about anyone else?

Incompetent

- What do you consistently get negative feedback about in your work?
- What do you do that just about everyone can do better?

Competent

- What work do you do that others can do just as well or better?
- What work do you do well though it doesn't feel totally satisfying?

Source: The 15 Commitments of Conscious Leadership.

“Fear guards the line between the zone of excellence and the ultimate zone of genius.”

4 false beliefs that inhibit people from living in their zone of genius:

- 1) Feeling fundamentally flawed: deep-rooted insecurity
- 2) Disloyalty and abandonment: poorly defined, imho, but basically I think they're referring to folks with humble beginnings being afraid to grow beyond their societal roots
- 3) More success = bigger burden: *Mo' Money, Mo' Problems*
- 4) Outshining: fear of outshining someone important to them.

9: Living a life of play and rest

Overview: commitment 9 is about avoiding burnout by remembering to play, laugh, and rest. Most companies adopt a mindset that equates success with *struggle*. The data suggests* that we are actually only productive for 3 hours per day (actual work). Effective leadership is primarily driven by *energy* management vs. time and money management.

“Play is an absorbing, apparently purposeless activity that provides enjoyment and suspends self-consciousness and a sense of time.” —Stuart Brown

**Your Brain At Work*, by David Rock

Key insights

“From our perspective this addiction to work is epidemic in our culture and it is not being faced. There is a collective collusion to live in denial about the reality of our lack of real freedom to choose to do anything other than work.”



10: Exploring the opposite

Overview: one of my favorite chapters, commitment 10 is about learning to be a curious fallibilist, always questioning the stories we tell ourselves in our head, and appreciating how the opposite of what we think could also be true (if not truer!). A lot of our pain in life is caused by our desire to “be right.” This is usually the result of the ego. What’s more important is TRUTH, which we can find by questioning our self-imposed labels on things, asking *Why do I believe that? How could the opposite be true?*

Key insights

- Would you rather be right or free?
- “If we are willing to reframe our subjective perspective, we can feel a sense of well-being in a matter of minutes.”
- Remain unattached to any outcome (some Buddhism here) and stay open to the exploration
- To help us let go of righteousness, the authors recommend Byron Katie’s approach, available at www.thework.comhttps://thework.com/

The Work is a Practice

Every time you do The Work you are becoming enlightened to who and what you are, the true nature of being. To question what you believe is an amazing gift to give yourself, and you can have it all the days of your life. The answers are always inside you, just waiting to be heard.

- “It is not the issue itself that causes pain, but your interpretation of it.”

11: Sourcing approval, control and security

Overview: all humans “wants” come back to 3 core desires: 1) approval, 2) control, and 3) security. This is basically the middle 3 layers of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, but let’s go with it. The goal of this chapter is to commit to being the source of your own approval, control and security. These things are not “out there,” but rather within. If you find yourself saying “If only [blank] would [blank]. . .” that’s a sign that you’re seeking external approval, control or security. The act of wanting implies your belief you lack it.

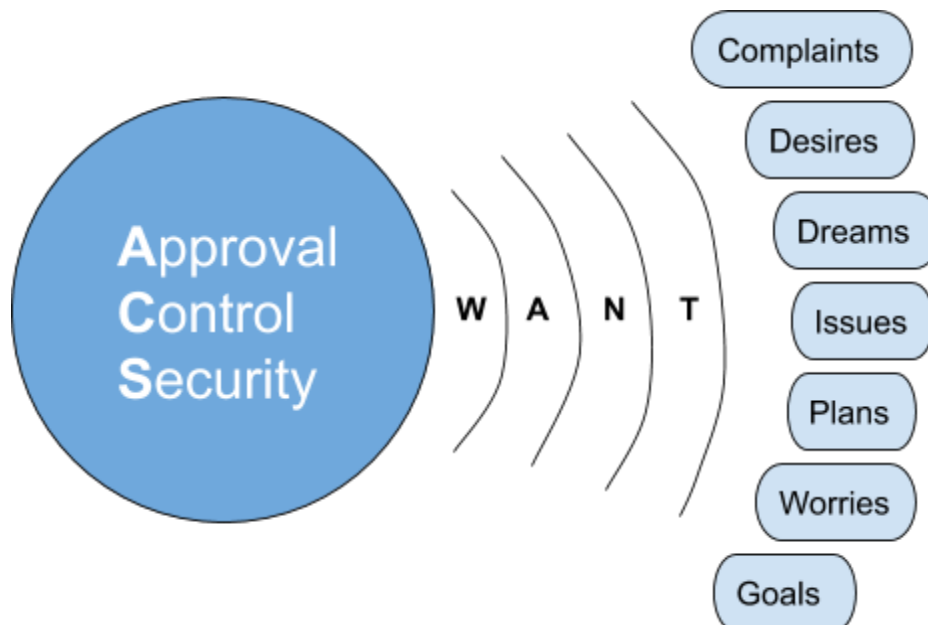
I want to be fit.

I don’t want to die early (Security)

I want to look good (Approval)

I want to improve what I eat and how much my body moves (Control)

In fact, it’s not the wants that are the issue. It’s the act of “wanting” that implies incompleteness. If you want something, you’re implying that you don’t already have it.



Key insights

- “This wanting leads to all kinds of beliefs and behaviors that are counter to the conscious leadership. This entire “game” is unconscious. *It is the operating system of the ego. . .*”
- “Pain in life is not optional, but suffering is. As long as we keep seeking and wanting something we believe we don’t have, we suffer.”

12: Having enough of everything

Overview: this chapter hit me like a ton of bricks because it tapped into deep-seated fears from childhood about not having enough (money, food, etc.). This has created a “scarcity mentality” which believes there is not enough of X to go around, and to hoard what’s “mine.” To the contrary, we must commit to believing that we have enough of everything including time, money, love, energy, space, resources, etc. To do this we must change to a mindset of **sufficiency** while avoiding comparison and focusing on the **present**.

Your Life =



*“This mantra of not enough carries the day and becomes a kind of default setting for our thinking about everything. . . and grows into the justification for an unfulfilled life.” —Lynne Twist, *The Soul of Money**

In other words, a scarcity mentality can become an excuse. A rationalization of fear.

Scarcity mindset also leads to **comparison**. I’ve found myself comparing my life to [Kyle Vogt](#), a massively successful entrepreneur who lives a few blocks from me. It makes me feel unsuccessful which isn’t healthy or productive.

“To experience scarcity, you must be outside yourself and the present moment—anticipating the lack of something in the future or harboring the lack of something from the past. When there is just now, there is always enough.”

13: Experiencing the world as an ally

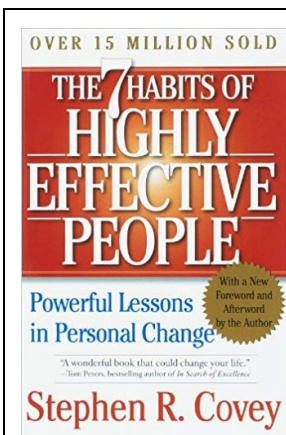
Overview: “I commit to seeing all people and circumstances as allies that are perfectly suited to help me learn the most important things for my growth.” What a fantastic sentence. This chapter is a powerful reinforcement of the Growth Mindset concept which encourages growth through **effort** and mastery through **challenge**. The world is not against you. “Circumstances” affect all of us. Some people learn and adapt, others blame and devolve.

“The inability of someone on the team to deliver his or her agreements offers valuable insight on your management skills or stubbornness to make a change earlier.”

Other people don’t even have to consciously commit to being your ally. If you are committed to experiencing them that way, they are always instrumental to your growth. [The obstacle is the way.](#)



14: Creating win-for-all solutions



Overview: perhaps a nod to Stephen Covey’s 4th of 7 habits of highly effective people (*Think Win/Win*), the authors urge us to commit to creating win-for-all solutions for whatever issues, problems, concerns, or opportunities life gives me. Essentially, try to avoid the zero-sum mentality whereby someone’s gain implies a loss elsewhere.

- Honestly, this chapter is a little light and lacks focus and clarity.
- If there was a takeaway, it might be try not to screw other people in your decision making.

15: Being the resolution

Overview: *I commit to being the resolution or solution that is needed: seeing what is missing in the world as an invitation to become that which is required.* Thought hard to reconcile with commitment 12 in which everything is complete, commitment 12 is essentially commitment 1 (taking radical responsibility) but applied to the larger stage of “the world.”

The opposite of commitment 15 would be to view the world with apathy or resentment while 1) doing nothing, and 2) blaming others.

