



# Grounded and Conscious: The New Leadership Imperative

By Bob Rosen and Emma Kate Swann

**W**e are living in an age of continuous disruption and acceleration, which is outpacing our ability to cope with change. As a result, many people and organizations are at risk of being left behind. We must perform for today *and* transform for tomorrow. But to do that we need a fresh approach to leading ourselves, teams, and organizations.

According to the newly launched Conscious Index (research commissioned by Healthy Companies International), 82 percent of Americans feel there would be less turmoil in the world if leaders were more conscious. 89 percent believe that conscious leaders drive significant organizational improvements, including 87 percent believing that conscious leadership leads to better financial performance. But we have a serious perception gap: 94 percent of C-suite executives believe they are very or somewhat conscious while only half of working adults observe highly conscious behavior in their leaders.

As organizational psychologists and executive advisors, we have long researched the contemporary challenges of effective leadership. Combining previous research from Healthy Companies with new provocative data, we have developed a compelling set of insights and solutions for today's leaders. Our research provides two core capabilities: "Grounded" is the foundation which helps leaders stay centered yet agile in the face of disruptive change. Being "Conscious" results in leaders being highly awake, aware, and adaptive. Leveraging these two core capabilities results in an accelerant that ensures purposeful forward movement. Being both grounded and conscious is the new leadership imperative.

## **Being Grounded: The Foundation**

The current approach to leadership is obsessed with how we perform in the short term, often at the expense of who we are as human beings. But in today's fast-changing,

unpredictable world, this has huge consequences for all of us. Clearly, what you do and how you perform are critical. But real success comes from who you are as a person—your purpose, values, relationships, and character—and that influences your behavior and actions. Who you are drives what you do and how you perform.

Who you are refers to individual aspects of yourself as a person—what we call your healthy roots. There are six of them: physical health, emotional health, intellectual health, social health, vocational health, and spiritual health (see below). When people focus on the roots of who they are, they have a clarity and honesty about themselves and what they can accomplish. The result is leadership that is highly personal, deeply grounded, and strong enough to handle the pressures of relentless change.

By planting seeds that ground yourself, you strengthen the deep-seated roots allowing you to withstand the winds of change. They include:

- **Physical Health:** Keeping you agile in a fast-paced world.
- **Emotional Health:** Helping you stay both tough and nimble in uncertain times.

- **Intellectual Health:** Providing the tools for learning and staying relevant in a complex environment.
- **Social Health:** Ensuring you have the relationship skills needed for living in a connective world.
- **Vocational Health:** Helping us balance meaningful work and competition in a demanding age.
- **Spiritual Health:** Connecting to the larger environment, and building trust, gratitude, and generosity in a world rife with cynicism.

Ultimately, much like the human body, where a complex web of respiratory, cardiovascular, and other systems work together, the roots of grounded leadership form an integrated whole. Yet each of the six roots predict job performance as rated by bosses, peers, and subordinates. At the same time, you can't expect the impossible: Not everybody excels at all six areas of health.

A case in point is Apple's Steve Jobs. By no means the perfect grounded leader, at times he neglected his physical, social, and emotional health. But he also possessed enormous intellectual, vocational, and spiritual health, allowing him to transform seven different industries, from personal



computers to digital publishing,

Ultimately, your best move is to keep trying to develop all your healthy roots—and accept that the task is a lifelong process

### Being Conscious: The Accelerant

Our world is changing faster than our ability to adapt. And the primary culprit is our lack of awareness. Nothing is more important than understanding ourselves, our relationships, and our surroundings. Being conscious helps us think deeper, learn faster, and collaborate better. The more aware we are, the faster we adapt and accelerate, and the higher performing we become. Conscious people bring their best selves to the table and challenge others to redefine what it means to be successful.

This understanding stands in direct opposition to current assumptions that being smart is the best path to success. In today's world, the approach simply gets in the way of adapting to the future. Driven by the need to be right, those obsessed with being smart tend to hoard knowledge, externalize blame, and mismanage relationships and risks. These actions sabotage their ability to thrive in a constantly changing world. In today's environment of accelerated disruption, smart is not enough. Being conscious is the new smart.

Why aren't we changing fast enough? Our research has pinpointed four reasons:

**We're too shallow.** That means we're unaware and too superficial in our thinking. We spend too little time self-reflecting and stay stuck in our personal stories about change. Since we don't always have a clear mirror that reflects how we show up in the world, our ability to change and our relationships with others are often stunted.

**We're too narrow.** Biased and close-minded, we often live in steel bunkers and can't see our way out. Accepting a world of biased minds and limited perspectives causes us to

miss opportunities, avoid diversity, and react irrationally to the changes around us.

**We're too safe.** We're too protective and reactive. Afraid of change and uncertainty, we stay stuck. By being too safe, we atrophy and fail to evolve and transform, leaving us standing in place as the world turns.

**We're too small.** Cautious or self-centered, we fail to see connections, possibilities, or solutions. Staying small and never stepping up is sure to lead to regrets and undermine your highest potential.

We've learned that the most successful people at all levels follow four powerful practices of being conscious (see below): *Go Deep* helps you discover your inner self. *Think Big* enables you to see a world of possibilities. *Get Real* shows you how to be honest and intentional. *Step Up* empowers you to act boldly and responsibly.

### Go Deep: Discover Your Inner Self

Like race horses at the Kentucky Derby, we navigate our fast-paced world by wearing metaphorical blinkers that blind us to a greater awareness of what's around us. By Going Deep, you remove those impediments and build a greater awareness of yourself and others, develop a more open mind, and find creative ways to cope with the speed and uncertainty of change. You move from superficial, shallow thinking to introspection and mental agility.

Key practices for Going Deep:

**Tap your innate wisdom.** We each have a natural intelligence, a genuine sense and sensibility, a fundamental sanity. Going Deep requires uncovering that innate wisdom, a discovery through which you overcome fears and gain the confidence to move forward, especially in difficult times.

**Manage your reptilian brain.** The neocortex, home to our more complex, cognitive thinking, and the emotional part of our brain that controls our feelings, aren't hard to manage. More troublesome is our powerful reptilian brain, the oldest and most primitive area that has been programmed to detect danger and allows fear to take over our reactions and actions. Being more conscious of irrational fears will not only help you let them go, but allow you to become better at leading through change.

**Get comfortable with being uncomfortable.** Like physical pain, discomfort serves a critical role for alerting you to what needs to be accepted, changed, or avoided. It is, in fact, a catalyst for learning and transformation. Without it, you'd have neither the motivation nor desire to fix anything. In our accelerating world, it's inevitable you will regularly face adversity. Vulnerability and imperfection are your natural protectors against adversity.

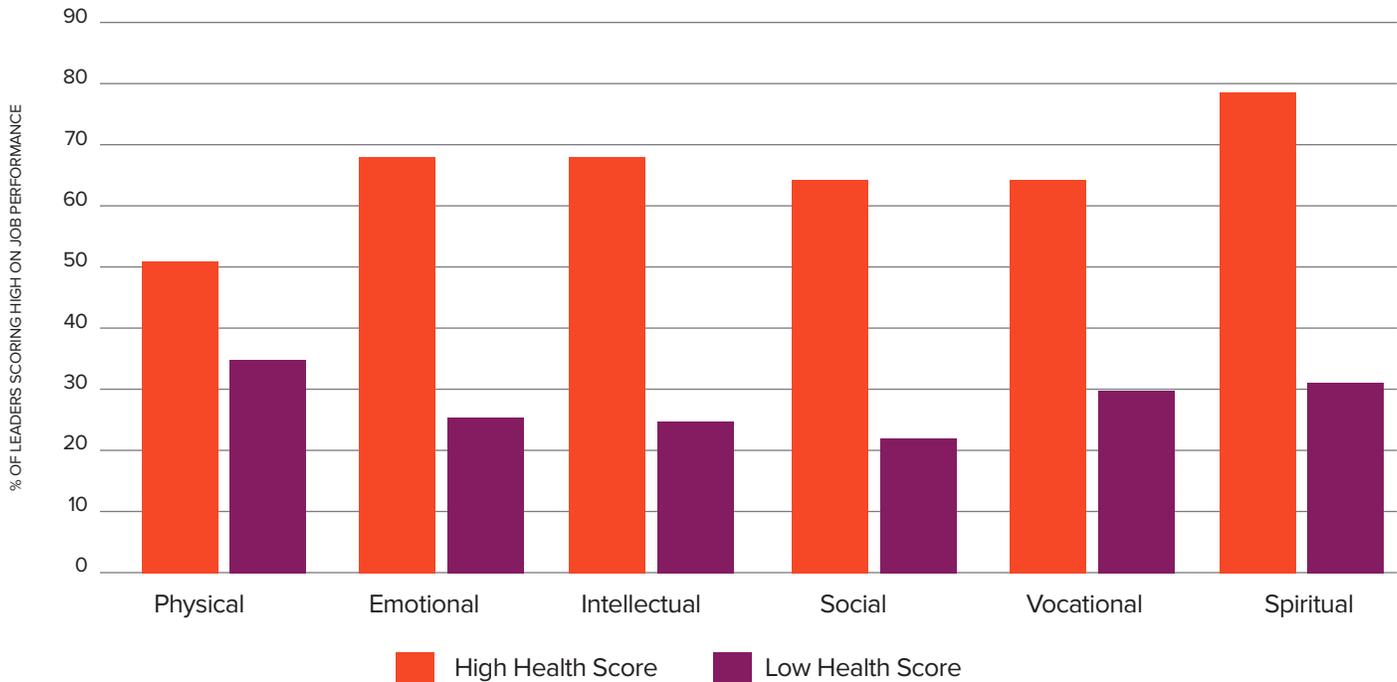
**Get rid of old baggage.** All of us have conversations with ourselves that keep us stuck in old patterns and shackled by dysfunctional habits. Like getting rid of worn out baggage, the better approach is to toss aside negative attachments, such as a penchant for clinging to the past or worrying about the future and learn to travel light and in the moment.

More than 45 years ago, then-23-year-old rugby player Nando Parrado was flying in an airplane that crashed high up in the Andes mountains. His mother died and, three days later,

LESS CONSCIOUS → MORE CONSCIOUS

<b>Shallow</b> <i>Unaware &amp; Superficial</i>	<b>Go Deep</b> <i>Aware &amp; Introspective</i>
<b>Narrow</b> <i>Biased &amp; Close-minded</i>	<b>Think Big</b> <i>Curious &amp; Adaptive</i>
<b>Safe</b> <i>Protective &amp; Reactive</i>	<b>Get Real</b> <i>Authentic &amp; Intentional</i>
<b>Small</b> <i>Cautious &amp; Self-centered</i>	<b>Step Up</b> <i>Bold &amp; Responsible</i>

## Grounded Leaders Outperform Their Peers



his sister passed away in his arms. Survivors spent more than two months with no food or warm clothing. Yet Parrado and another passenger were able to walk for 10 days back to civilization to bring back help.

It was through this profound experience that Parrado learned to tap his innate wisdom. His near-death experience gave him a powerful understanding of the importance of love, life, and focusing on things that truly matter. He also lost all fear of trivial everyday risks and, as a result, feels no trepidation taking chances in business. Today, he is the CEO of six successful companies.

### Think Big: See a World of Possibilities

To look outside yourself to see the world clearly, expand your mind, and tap into your creativity, you need to overcome the pitfalls of being too narrow. Learning to Think Big helps you move from being close-minded to being curious and expansive. Organizations today need people to learn faster, rise above the din, and see the larger picture. That's particularly challenging in today's digital world, where seemingly unlimited access to information makes us distracted, and impatient. The antidote is adaptive and innovative thinking.

Key practices for Thinking Big:

**Be your own drone.** To rise above the noise and view the bigger picture you need, in effect, to become your own drone, finding ways to peer over the horizon. You'll be able to see emotions, events, and relationships clearly as data that can inform your next moves.

**Leverage your personal ecosystem.** One tool you can use is learning how to leverage your most valuable asset, your personal ecosystem—your personal brand, your positive relationships, and your networks. To Think Big you need to create a perpetual motion machine of ideas, energy, and relationships. But

you can only accomplish this with a high-functioning personal ecosystem.

**Develop a Google mind.** That means learning how to learn and being relevant all the time. This capacity requires a growth mindset allowing you to think with a broader view, seeking out uncertain situations, and choosing action over inaction. Some years ago, at Healthy Companies, we conducted a project with the Darden School of Business at the University of Virginia to figure out how great growth leaders succeeded in today's accelerating world. The big differentiator between success and mediocrity was their Google mind.

**Practice "and" is the new "or."** Succeeding in a complex world requires having a complex mind. For that reason, simple either-or thinking doesn't cut it anymore. The alternative is to learn to think in paradoxes and contradictions. Conscious people create more choices by holding opposing ideas in their heads at the same time.

Few people in the business world are more aware of the importance of the sharing economy than General Motors' Chief Talent Officer Michael Arena. His mission is to guide GM's leaders to build thousands of personal ecosystems that network together and create a collective intelligence. Arena is a firm believer that productivity, big ideas, and creative thinking happen at the intersection of people. That's his secret sauce for innovation.

With that in mind, Arena has created GM's Innovation Exchange Lab, an intranet of people and ideas crisscrossing the company. It allows the best ideas and brightest minds to work collectively, rather than in silos or direct competition with one another. Tapping into this collective intelligence is key to transforming the culture within GM. Says Arena, "It's all about the network and how people are connected."

Ultimately, for Arena, building a personal ecosystem

requires a few critical elements: having a small core of trusted friends unafraid of being completely honest with you, honing in on a network of key influencers, and embracing conflict and lively discussion of ideas.

## Get Real: Manage Your Accelerators and Hijackers

To Get Real requires that we see reality for what it is, not what we want it to be. It means to become honest and deliberate in your life, to move from the reactive to the intentional. That requires mastering realistic optimism—being realistic about problems, triumphs, and failures, while remaining upbeat about the future.

Key practices for Getting Real:

**Transform yourself.** Our lives are spent living in the gap—the gap between our current reality and our desired future. But transformational change demands accelerating the process of moving forward. Specifically, it involves mastering four channels: seeing clearly, thinking openly, feeling positively, and acting constructively. By being teachers who model and champion change, we create environments that foster transformation.

**Live with just enough anxiety.** While anxiety is a fact of life, how you use it makes all the difference. Let the emotion overwhelm you and you'll panic. Run away from it and you become complacent. But use anxiety in a positive way and you can turn it into a powerful force in your life. The key is seeing anxiety as a wake-up call, a message inside our mind and body telling us to pay attention.

Organizations today need people to learn faster, rise above the din, and see the larger picture. That's particularly challenging in today's digital world but the antidote is adaptive and innovative thinking.

**Feed your positive accelerators.** Accelerators are catalysts for change. They activate our positive energy, drive us forward, help us get what we want, and teach us to be better people. The more aware we are of our accelerators, such as courage, drive, and resilience, the more we can use them to activate change.

**Manage your negative hijackers.** In a disruptive and accelerating world, we are all vulnerable to being hijacked by such feelings as cynicism or the need for control. They derail and sabotage us, undermining our best selves, and weaken our leadership. But once we become aware of that process, we can choose a different, more-productive response.

Our hijackers can overwhelm the best of us. Michael Phelps, winner of 23 Olympic gold medals, is one example. The years that followed his astonishing eight gold medal performance at the 2008 Beijing Olympics were marked by multiple DUIs, as well as drug and alcohol abuse and broken relationships. Finally, he entered an Arizona rehab facility and,

there, he confronted his many hijackers—most notably, a need to live up to others' expectations and an intense perfectionism. By 2016, Phelps had learned enough about himself to compete in the Rio Games. Drawing on his many accelerators—drive, desire, practice, focus, resilience, and confidence—he won five gold medals and one silver, to become the most decorated Olympian of all time.

## Step Up: Reach Your Highest Potential

Many of us approach the world too cautiously and in a small, self-centered way. As a result, we fail to unleash our personal power, something that is central to bold and responsible change leadership. By Stepping Up, we catapult ourselves into a much bigger version of ourselves, taking advantage of opportunities that we might otherwise have missed and being willing to take risks.

Key practices for Stepping Up:

**Champion your higher purpose.** Conscious people possess a higher purpose, allowing them to merge doing good with achieving their goals. Ultimately, purpose is the connection between what we do and why we do it. In fact, surveys show that three out of four executives report their principal driver in life is the belief their work has purpose and meaning.

**Lead with constructive impatience.** If you want others to Step Up, you better start with yourself. That's the heart of constructive impatience. By becoming more conscious, we learn to be our own personal agents of change. Some of us tend to be constructive by nature, building psychologically safe environments for ourselves and others. Others are naturally impatient, challenging our limits, pushing ourselves to expand capabilities beyond what we imagined possible. But the two parts are inextricably bound together to create positive energy and results.

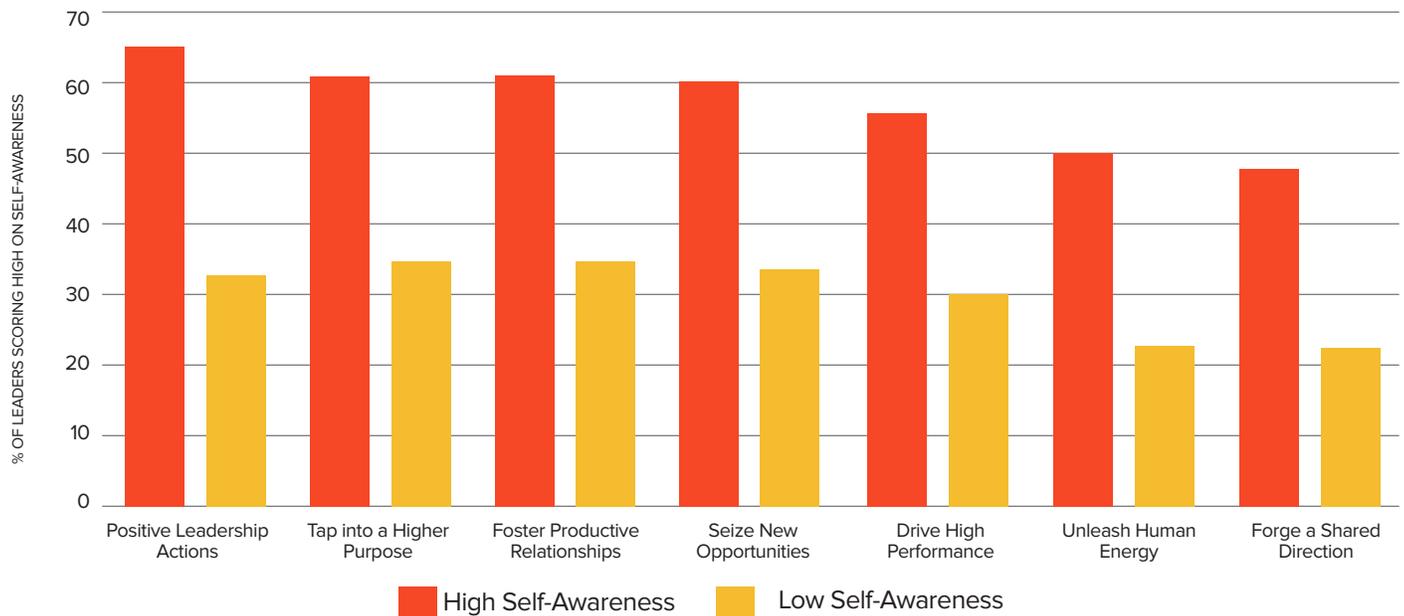
**Make civility your guide.** In a partisan and polarizing world, the essence of civility—being courteous and considerate—is the core of all relationships. Incivility, on the other hand, is contagious and poisons relationships. When people work under a cloud of negativity, they stop taking risks, make more mistakes, and fail to collaborate. Conscious people realize there is a human being on the other end of every connection.

**Help your garden grow.** In a garden, everything has a purpose. You can build strong roots, weed out bad company, and attend to your buds and flowers. Similarly, becoming more conscious lets you nourish leadership in others, nurturing the inherent desire to learn and grow. Our job as leaders is to enable our human gardens to grow.

In the fall of 2012, New York City's Mayor Michael Bloomberg was looking forward to easing into private life and running his brand-new super-PAC. Then Super Storm Sandy hit.

The storm's rising tides shut down the entire city, flooding the subway and streets along the Hudson River, destroying homes, and upending lives. Today, Bloomberg, the founder of one of America's largest private companies, is focused on creating a better world, making it his mission to awaken others to the challenges of climate change. The personification of Stepping Up, instead of choosing the luxury of a wealthy, quiet life, he decided to become a champion of change.

## Conscious Leaders Outperform Their Peers



### MedStar: A Case Study in Transformation

As CEO of MedStar Health, Ken Samet leads a \$6 billion nonprofit health care system, the largest system in the Washington, DC, and Baltimore region. In 2008, he set out on a journey to transform the organization from a group of independent, acute hospitals into a comprehensive distributed care delivery system. Ever since, Samet has been forging strategies and initiatives that emphasize MedStar 2020—a single comprehensive strategy for the future. Samet realized early on that his primary job was to connect with 30,000 associates and 6,000 physicians. To achieve this, one of Samet’s best tools has been himself and his natural authenticity.

“I think you have to be comfortable in your own skin,” says Samet. “I’m privileged to have the opportunity to do this role. By the same token, I understand it’s not about me and there’s a lot of smarter folks around me. All of a sudden, you stand up and you’re not real. And it doesn’t take but a few times for folks to actually say that was all bull—just like that.”

Samet’s challenge was to develop a cadre of grounded and conscious change leaders at all levels of the organization. His goals were to:

- Strengthen agility and resilience in an uncertain world
- Deepen keener awareness of self, others, and the environment
- Lead and accelerate change more effectively
- Model and champion a new change ready culture, and
- Increase collaboration, connections and performance.

Over the past 10 years, Healthy Companies has worked closely with Samet, his executive leadership teams and thousands of managers who lead this transformation. Through those efforts, the company developed a leadership benchmark for the organization—the MedStar Leader of the Future. A combination of retreats, assessments, personal development plans, coaching performance support, and other tools helped

to accelerate their learning. An important aspect was focusing on education and development specifically for physicians and nurses across the organization.

When the organization was ready to scale, over 3,000 of the company’s managers went through a four-day leadership program. A four-day certification process enabled the organization to use its in-house experts to help deliver the program. The goal of these efforts was to create a common language across the company leading to a higher level of consciousness and capability. Today, MedStar Health is benefiting from its long-term, systemwide investment. There are significantly more leaders in the pipeline, engagements scores are up, and quality and safety efforts have continued to rise. The company continues to navigate through the challenges and uncertainties of the U.S. healthcare industry with sustained business and financial success.

Ultimately, organizations that want to survive and thrive in today’s world of disruption and accelerating change face a clear choice: Create transformational leaders schooled in the critical elements of being Grounded and Conscious—or fall further behind. We believe this is the next human intelligence required inside organizations of the future. ■■

**Bob Rosen, Ph.D.**, is a trusted CEO advisor, organizational psychologist, and author of eight leadership books, including the *New York Times* bestseller *Grounded* and his most recent book, *Conscious: The Power of Awareness in Business and Life*. As CEO of Healthy Companies, he has advised top executives in global 1000 companies around the world.

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