


The
LANGUAGES
of LEADERSHIP



*How to use your
words, actions
and behaviours to
influence your team,
peers and boss*

WENDY BORN

Praise for *The Languages of Leadership*

The Languages of Leadership is a great tool for those who are keen to understand where they are in their leadership journey and how to shape their own brand and style as a connected and impactful leader.

Fiona Schutt, Chief Financial Officer, Worksafe Victoria

Ever had a boss who made you just want to switch off? “Blah, blah, blah...” When they talked in a meeting, you were more focused on not obviously falling asleep. Well, be different and don’t be that boss.

This book written by Wendy Born is a great starter, reference and tool for leaders to be better. Be better at connecting. Be better at choosing the right words and behaviour.

Easy right? Nope. It isn’t. It can be hard, very hard and that’s okay because the gold is here in your hands.

Wendy talks about the Languages of Leadership. These are simple yet powerful concepts that I now use. They work. They make a difference. They are also as shallow and as deep as you’d like to go. She gets it. Her experience and the help that she offers is all captured here.

If you are an aspiring leader, please do not be the one blah, blah, blah-ing up front. Do it differently. Do it with purpose. Do it understanding and wanting to connect with those very people you lead. Do it with the right Languages of Leadership!

Digby Wilson, Principal, South East Australia, Field Service Delivery, Australia & International Delivery, Global Business Services, Telstra

Wendy manages to cut through to the essence of successful leadership. This book provides the tools to help you rethink your behaviours and practise effective leadership from within, whilst leveraging external elements to your advantage.

Anne Logan, Financial Controller Asia Pacific, Human Resources Manager Australia, MSX International

After leading large teams across a number of large organisations, and having the benefit of attending many leadership courses over the years, this book gave me knowledge, insight and challenged me with a fresh perspective. To be able to add these languages to my repertoire, and the knowledge to be able to apply the learnings in practical situations, means that this book isn't just about the theory that can't be applied. For this reason, it's a must-read book for any leader at any stage of their leadership journey.

Paul Harper, Program Director, Finance Business Transformation, Deakin University

We all have times when, as a leader, we feel stuck and are not getting the impact we want. Wendy's *The Languages of Leadership* provides a very practical guide to how you can take control of your words, actions and behaviours to become the leader you aspire to be. Whether you are new to a leadership role or a leadership veteran, there is something in this book for you. Take the time to invest in being the leader you aspire to be as 'your impact is your leadership footprint' and we all want to leave a legacy of footprints people are willing to follow!

Somone Johns, General Manager, Transformation, Telstra

Wendy has managed to define why language is so important in a simple and easy-to-read way. As a leader, I am constantly aware of how my language resonates with my team and this book explains why. The chapter on vulnerability is particularly relevant in today's business world, understanding why it is important to demonstrate vulnerability and how it builds trust within teams is brilliant.

Linda Barry, General Manager Programs, Alannah & Madeline Foundation

The Languages of Leadership is a book for all leaders at any stage of their career. Wendy provides practical tools and tips to help you to be a better leader for your people, have better relationships with your peers and to get noticed by your boss. Well worth the read.

Andrew McWhirter, CEO The Influencer Project

First published in 2019 by Major Street Publishing Pty Ltd

PO Box 106, Highett, Vic. 3190

E: info@majorstreet.com.au

W: majorstreet.com.au

M: +61 421 707 983

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Ordering information

Quantity sales. Special discounts are available on quantity purchases by corporations, associations and others. For details, contact Lesley Williams using the contact details above.

Individual sales. Major Street publications are available through most bookstores. They can also be ordered directly from Major Street's online bookstore at www.majorstreet.com.au.

Orders for university textbook/course adoption use. For orders of this nature, please contact Lesley Williams using the contact details above.

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the National Library of Australia

ISBN: 978-0-6484100-1-0

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Internal design by Production Works

Cover design by Simone Geary

Printed in Australia by Griffin Press

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Wendy Born helps leaders maximise their talent and strengths to achieve extraordinary results.

As an engaging facilitator, coach, speaker (and now author) she works with executives, senior leaders and leadership teams to create high-performance organisations that deliver that WOW-factor.

On any given day, leadership can be rewarding, frustrating, fun, risky and scary – all within the first hour. It can make you feel annoyed, furious, happy, proud, inspired or like you want to curl up in a corner and rock back and forth.

With Wendy's guidance, leaders learn to build strong and enduring relationships to drive engagement and deliver on real strategic results that make the whole journey easier, more effective and, even, enjoyable.

Wendy is a highly experienced and recognised coach. She has more than 25 years of experience in corporate and management roles, including 10 years in senior leadership positions in finance, IT, retail, financial services, communications and government.

She also holds qualifications in human resources, finance, operations management and is a certified personal and professional coach. Plus, Wendy is a graduate from the Harvard Kennedy School, Executive Education in 21st Century Leadership.

When she's not working, Wendy is continually challenged by her two kids, Harry and Lucy, who (without knowing it) teach her more about leadership than you ever would think possible.

She would not have it any other way.

wendyborn.com.au

firstteamfirst.com.au

INTRODUCTION

Sam is struggling at work. He's just been promoted to a new role as a senior leader in a large corporation and is in charge of leading about 3,000 people. The department is complex, running across the country with state-based general managers, who are in charge of their own smaller teams, now directly reporting to Sam.

Sam also has a new leader whom he dislikes, Rod. In trying to win the support of his new division, Rod has promised to fix a lot of problems, but there is much chatter around the organisation about whether Rod will actually be able to deliver anything at all. Rod's leadership style is significantly different to that of Sam's previous leader and many people are talking about him being inauthentic, narcissistic and tending to 'go rogue' and off-script, promising all sorts of unrealistic things.

He is worried that his team are expecting some of their big problems to be solved by Rod. If he doesn't deliver then the relationship between Sam and his people may be at risk.

Sam has also witnessed a lot of change in roles among his peers since Rod arrived, not to mention political games and passive aggressive behaviours. It is fairly common for people to go over heads, to escalate basic decision making and there's an overall lack of trust that people will deliver.

Then there's Sam's own leadership team. There are inconsistencies in the quality of service delivered across all of these

teams ranging from outperformance to underperformance. The teams also tend to do things independent of each other, with little to no collaboration. They will agree to things in meetings and then do the opposite afterwards, and they all have differing views of what success looks like for their function.

Does this scenario sound familiar?

That's because it is. It's achingly familiar across many organisations in many different industries.

Many of us have issues trying to lead disparate teams with multiple personalities, colleagues with conflicting agendas and bosses with minds of their own.

The questions we often ask ourselves are:

- How do I manage my **team** leaders to work together without having to reinvent the wheel, to learn from and leverage each other's experience without getting competitive, and to be more effective in managing the performance of their own teams?
- How do I manage my **peers** to have productive and positive relationships, to make decisions more effectively without being dragged into the detail or office politics and to be more focused putting aside individual agendas?
- How do I manage my **leader** to stop making big promises to my team that I know they won't deliver on,

to give me the space I need to get my job done and to be open to my ideas and be willing to support them?

Once upon a time, it was enough just to lead your team and that was it. But organisations today are more complex, departments are vast, reporting structures are multi-faceted. As leaders, we are expected to manage so many different relationships at so many different levels in an organisation, that it can feel as if we need multiple personalities just to stay sane.

Even if you really like your job and the people you work with, there are so many things that need to get fixed. You can see the potential of the organisation, your function and your people, if only you could all get out of the way and get things done!

Any sort of progress is like pushing an A380 aircraft with your little finger – it's hard work, overwhelming and on the verge of breaking you.

If only you could get people on board with what you are doing. If only you could get the support you need from senior leaders. If only you could get your people moving in the right direction, together. If only...

The thing is that most of this 'stuff' is out of your control.

It doesn't matter how hard you try, how much you persevere, how much you try to control the behaviours of others, with this kind of approach you will still always feel stuck. You literally have no control over other people.

You don't have control over other people, but you do have control over yourself – your words, actions, behaviours... that is, your leadership language.

Managing relationships positively, effectively and productively starts with YOU.

There are six leadership languages you need to master to help you to manage anyone, anywhere:

- **I am an Active Leader**
 1. I am courageous
 2. I am strong
- **I am a Directive Leader**
 3. I engineer the world around me
 4. I abdicate power to others
- **I am a Perceptive Leader**
 5. I trust and am trusted
 6. I can be vulnerable.

I have worked with many leaders within some of Australia's largest organisations over the years, who have all been where you are right now. I have also been where you are now and I understand your frustration working for a leader who doesn't inspire you, and sometimes barely even notices you are there. I have worked with peers who actively seemed to work against me, and I've had team members who just didn't seem to care.

I have helped many leaders, just like you, overcome these obstacles by changing the way they talk and behave, because it's all within their control.

Sadly, we aren't taught this stuff in school, at work or on our MBA program. Instead, we often pick up the habits of those who have led us in the past or try and find a solution in a leadership book. The trouble is that a lot of information out there is focused mainly on the theory of leadership or leading people, but there is much more to leading than just theory.

You need simple, practical tools and techniques that you can action and implement everyday – that's what you'll find in this book. When you put all of these small changes together, that's when you get a big impact both individually and organisationally.

When you learn to balance these languages – and balance you shall soon see is the key – you start to get yourself noticed, to manage anyone at any level and to build your reputation in the market as one of the best leaders in your industry.

That's exactly what we're going to learn to do now.

Are you ready to learn the languages of leadership?

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Throughout my life I have always found that when I am learning something new, I need to watch someone else doing it first and then actually physically do it myself. This is the only way that I am truly able to master what I am learning.

Then, the more I do it the better I get at it. Are you the same?

Whenever I work with a leader or leadership team, one of the first things I tell them is that I am a simple girl and complexity hurts my brain. So I will never give them anything complex or too hard to implement. Wherever possible I look for simple and easy ways to apply techniques and tools because if something's too hard it will never get done.

For these two reasons, I have designed this book to be a practical handbook for you to use. You'll find simple tools and techniques that don't take an age to practise, or hours and hours to master. Rather, they are simple and effective actions you can start taking today that will change how you lead, forever.

In Part I of this book, you will look at and understand the journey of leadership and how, when you reframe your thinking from blaming others to concentrating on what's within your control – your own words, actions and behaviours – your world opens up to allow you much more influence.

In Part II, you will be introduced to each of the six languages of leadership and find out how you can develop and

put each one into practice when you need to. At the end of each chapter you will find words, actions and behaviours to actually practise using each language until you become comfortable with it.

Finally in Part III, you will learn how to balance each of the languages so you don't over or under use them, to avoid falling over.

There is nothing in the pages of this book that you can't ever do. You just need to take your first step, then your next and keep going.

As Benjamin Franklin once said: "Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn."

So that's what we're going to do.

Part I

**SPEAK THE
TRUTH**

Leadership is hard work. But most of the time, we blame everyone else for this!

The people we work with are always taking up so much of our time because they just can't get it right. They demand all of our focus and all of our attention.

We don't seem to have any influence or control over what is happening around us and we are frustrated, overworked and annoyed. We just can't seem to see the light at the end of the tunnel. We continue to be ineffective, losing credibility and unable to influence.

But the error in this reasoning is that we are surrounded by incompetence. It's everywhere, right? Except for with you that is.

So what if we started to shift our focus from what's actually going on, to what could be going on?

In Part I, you'll discover that we are better to reframe our own words, actions and behaviours instead of trying to control others.

You'll learn why it's easy to influence those around us, so that they do better things, become better leaders and achieve better results. Then, and only then, will you transform from being an isolated leader to an inspiring one.

Let's explore how.

In this part of the book, I help you understand why confidence plays such an important role in your leadership potential.



Chapter 1

I AM THE MASTER OF MY OWN DESTINY

“How’s the new job going?” Simone asked.

“Oh terrible! I’m surrounded by idiots. You wouldn’t believe it! The boss is all over my work and doesn’t let me do anything outside the scope of my role. The people I work with are always questioning my decisions and then telling me how to manage my team. The people who work for me can’t seem to get anything right and I am always having to step in and fix up their problems. I can’t believe I took on this job in the first place” Peter replied.

“That sounds awful. What are you going to do?” asks Simone.

“Well, I can’t do too much really, it’s all down to everyone else, nothing’s within my control. I guess I just have to live with it,” Peter responded.

“Yeah, I know what you mean, it’s the same everywhere”.

When Peter got home that night his wife asked him how his day had been.

“Terrible, I can’t work with these people, I have had to bring home a mountain of work to do because no-one around me seems to be able to do anything properly. I’m not sure how long I can keep doing everyone’s job for them.”

“Well, what about the parent–teacher meeting we have tonight, plus you said you would help the kids with their homework when we got home. When are you going to have time to do work?”

“Damn, I forgot. I’ll have to do it all after the kids are in bed.”

These types of conversations are all too familiar to leaders in an organisation, and they can cause a great deal of stress, both at work and at home.

You often find yourself doing everyone else’s job, on top of your own, to make sure that work gets done and deadlines are met. The people who work for you seem to treat you like their parent, always asking for the answers to their problems, never being able to make a decision, and you have to sort out their fights like you are back in the playground.

At the same time, you’re managing the delicate relationships with those above you, beside you and below you, just to get your job done.

You can’t ever seem to get anywhere with your boss as they are either too controlling or you never see them. Your peers are like speed bumps on the road – they cause you to slow

down considerably on what you see as a clear and straight path to your outcome. Sometimes if you go over them at high speed they cause damage to your suspension and can potentially knock you off course.

It's as if you're the meat in the sandwich, all the time.

As Peter says, you don't feel as though you can do much because it's *everyone else* who is impacting on your world. If they would just get out of the way, or get on board with what you are trying to do, your life would be so much easier. Right?

It's not your fault – or is it?

We are psychologically wired to believe that in scenarios like this it's everyone else who is at fault.

It is the psychological phenomenon known as the Fundamental Attribution Error that is at play here, helping you to lay the blame securely at everyone else's feet.

The Fundamental Attribution Error is defined by Mark Sherman Ph.D. in his article 'Why We Don't Give Each Other a Break' as "the tendency to overestimate the effect of disposition or personality and underestimate the effect of the situation in explaining social behaviour".

We are more likely to say that it is someone else's fault first before we consider the situation that contributes to that person's behaviour.

Here's an example to bring it to life.

Mary gets a promotion and in your eyes it's because she is just lucky, she sucks up to the boss all the time and is a know-it-all (her personality). It's certainly not because she has worked hard, closed a big deal and has had leadership experience before (her situation).

When we consider those we work with, we are more likely to explain their behaviour as a direct result of their personality, and certainly nothing to do with the situation that they are currently in. For example, that they may not be trained in something, that they have too much work to do, or they simply might be having a really bad day.

Fundamental Attribution Error also works in reverse, when it's always the situation that has impacted on us and is causing us to respond the way we do. It's got nothing to do with our own personality or behaviour.

We are also designed to take things personally which, despite being told many times over the years not to, most of us still tend to do!

As humans, taking it personally often drives many good things, such as our ethical behaviour, the way we manage risk and our overall work ethic. If we didn't take these things personally we would have a completely erroneous society.

In a *Harvard Business Review* article "Don't Take It Personally" Is Terrible Work Advice', Duncan Coombe notes that when we don't take things personally we can become disengaged and indifferent. If we don't care enough we see fraud, workplace scandals and bullying start to increase.

I am the master of my own destiny

Like most things, we also run the risk of taking things *too* personally leading to low self-esteem, stress and fear, and then we tend to overcompensate.

For example, Peter's need to take work home to compensate for his people not being able to do anything properly may be due to his fear of not meeting deadlines, or an excessive need for control of the outcome.

The key is to take your own work personally enough to stay motivated, but not so personally that you are offended or disheartened.

Circle of concern vs circle of influence

In Stephen Covey's best-selling book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, he talks about the circle of concern and the circle of influence.

In the circle of concern are the things you are concerned about yet have no control over, and in the circle of influence are all the things in your life you can control, or do something about.

By shifting your focus from your concerns, or things outside your control, onto things that are within your own influence, you find that your circle of influence becomes larger.

Conversely, if you are focusing on your concerns only, on that which you have little control over, you will find that your circle of influence shrinks.

The same can apply to how you manage the relationships you have with those you work with. Instead of focusing on everyone else, if you shift your focus onto that which you can control – namely your own behaviours – you may find that your influence and impact over those you work with will increase.

Understanding the influence that your own behaviours have on those around you is an attribute of Emotional Intelligence (EQ). The link between Emotional Intelligence and effective leadership is well documented and leads to increases in productivity, motivation and engagement.

In Daniel Goleman's book *Emotional Intelligence*, he talks about the value of EQ for fostering good social interactions because it helps you to empathise more through better understanding of the situations of others. There is nothing more valuable than walking a mile in another person's shoes.

It therefore makes sense that understanding more about how your own behaviour is contributing to the circumstances and people around you, and how that flows back to impact your life, can lead to an increase in understanding and further empowering you to have more control over your circumstances.

In his book *Vital Friends: the people you can't afford to live without*, Tom Rath found that where people have positive relationships at work, or even a best friend, they are seven times more likely to be engaged in their job and be more productive.

Additionally, when writer Chris Bailey decided to do an experiment on productivity strategies by isolating himself

for ten days from friends and family in the basement of his girlfriend's father's house, he discovered that his motivation to get work done reduced significantly, and that the primary reason he was working was for the benefit of the people he loved.

Increasing our circle of influence, and decreasing the impact of the Fundamental Attribution Error, therefore enables us to take things personally in a positive way that actually drives our performance.

Reflect on how you can change

I once worked with a guy who constantly said he was 'the numbers guy'. He believed that this was an adequate rationale for him not to have to deal with any personal issues with his people. This was simply 'who he was' and he used this as an excuse not to change anything! (I'm sure you know someone like this... maybe it's even you, if you're being honest.)

Neurologically our brains are wired to put us on autopilot, which means we will always behave in a way that is in-built to us; to do what comes naturally to us, which has been developed over many years, influenced by things like our education, parental influence, socio-economic factors, values and beliefs.

The problem with being on autopilot is that we rarely take the time to listen to what we are saying, or reflect on what we have done, to be able to draw insight from these actions in order to understand them.

If we don't understand what we are doing, we have no chance of changing it to get a better outcome.

Regular reflection of our words, actions and behaviours has a positive impact on our overall wellbeing. Meier, Cho and Dumani (2015) in the *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, found that “work reflection was associated with an increase in affective wellbeing, with regard to both positive and negative moods.” Additionally, research conducted by Stefano et al on call centre productivity found that those employees who reflected on their performance for 15 minutes each day performed 23% better than those who didn't reflect.

If reflection has such a positive impact on our overall wellbeing and performance, why is it that so few of us actually do it?

Reflection can be confronting, because it means looking at what we have done, which isn't always good. It means that we may have to admit that some of the things we do aren't really that nice and don't contribute to the greater good. This makes us uncomfortable and vulnerable, and we tend to avoid doing it.

In Jennifer Porter's article in the *Harvard Business Review*, 'Why you should make time for self-reflection (even if you hate doing it)', she concludes that leaders often don't understand the process, don't like the process, don't like the results, have an over-bias towards action rather than thinking, and can't see a good return on investment from reflection.

Taking the time to reflect on our actions and how they impact others gives us an opportunity to create meaning, and from meaning comes learning.

Learn to lead better

Reflection needs to be part of your daily routine, something that you take the time to do without fail, and if you miss doing it your day isn't finished. This is a critical leadership activity that will lead to a continual loop of improvement for you – but only if you commit to a regular practice. Continuing to improve the way you do things leads to better relationships with those you lead, those you work with and those you report to. This leads to better productivity and to better bottom lines for organisations.

Through creating this continual learning loop, you become the leader you want to be. You continue to make tweaks and adjustments to what you say and do, which are observed by those you work with. They see you kicking goals, winning deals, influencing those around you and your confidence growing. They want to come and work for you, be led by you and be inspired by you. You are more in control of where you are going, what you want to get done, and you're doing it on your terms.

You're the master of your own destiny – so own it.

Change is within your control

Andrew was the General Manager of an operations function with a large organisation. He had seven direct reports who had varying degrees of competence and experience. Andrew was a control freak, and he managed each one of his direct reports like pawns in a chess game.

He would often talk to members of his leadership team about other members, as if 'comparing notes'. He kept everyone on their toes with his volatile behaviour; his team never knew what mood he was going to be in, he would switch in a matter of seconds from being nice guy to nasty guy, tearing the paint off the walls with his verbal tirades.

This led his leadership team down a path of dysfunction, having to manage up well or be eaten alive. The culture within the business unit was one of name, blame and shame to cover your backside at all costs. They were all for their own self-interest and this permeated down throughout the function. Things were grim, engagement low and everyone was trying to get out.

When Andrew was promoted to another role in a different area of the organisation, his natural replacement was one of his direct reports, Chris. Chris had been in the function for a little over 12 months, and was considered to be a high-potential employee.

Chris had come from outside the organisation and had a broad range of experience leading large teams. His experience of being led by Andrew had disappointed him, and he knew the team were in a bad way. He knew he had a lot of work ahead of him to rebuild the team.

I am the master of my own destiny

Chris took the team away on an offsite and told them how his personal reflection of his own behaviour over the last 12 months had led him to believe that he could have done more to support the team under Andrew's leadership. He felt there were times when, as a senior leader within the team, he had acted in a selfish way and was more concerned about his own function instead of the whole team. He told them he planned to lead in a very different way to Andrew and would value their help and support to lead the function. Chris considered the team to be his work family and wanted the team to start building their trust with each other, so they could all feel supported and appreciated for what they achieve.

Twelve months after Andrew had left, the team are now in a very different place. They are still a work-in-progress, however by learning from the past, reflecting on their own behaviour and building trust within the team, they are managing to deliver more of their targets than previously.