

# BECOMING A CAN-DO LEADER



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A GUIDE FOR THE  
BUSY MANAGER

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FRANK SATTERTHWAITE AND JAMIE MILLARD

## MORE PRAISE FOR THIS BOOK

“*Becoming A Can Do Leader* provides specific suggestions and compelling examples to help leaders find the ‘can-do zone’—an optimum mix of engagement and delegation that releases a team’s energy in the most productive way.”

—Clay Jones, Retired Chairman and CEO, Rockwell Collins

“*Becoming a Can-Do Leader* not only recognizes the struggles we all have as working managers, but gives practical tips for becoming more effective and efficient—a win-win all around!”

—Karen Freedman, VP of Learning, global insurance company

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“The new economy is demanding a new kind of leader who is both manager and technical expert—both leader and doer. Unfortunately there was precious little advice on how to effectively perform both roles, until now. *Becoming A Can-Do Leader* provides practical advice on mastering both roles, and creating a powerful learning culture.”

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“At Johnson & Wales University we like to disrupt conventional thinking in ways that will enable our students to continue to achieve professional success as leaders in the fast-changing world ahead. *Becoming a Can-Do Leader* provides practical steps for doing just that.”

—Thomas L. Dwyer, Provost, Johnson & Wales University

“Unleashing the ‘can-do’ in each of us is a prerequisite for delivering value in today’s workplace environments. *Becoming a Can-Do Leader* provides useful tips and tools so managers can deal with fast-moving change while still delivering on their commitments.”

—Beth Nelson Cliff, VP, Head of Talent  
and Organizational Development, Shire

“*Becoming a Can-Do Leader* is a must read for those of us driven to distraction by having to be both a leader and a doer.”

—Tom Casey, Managing Principal, Discussion Partners Collaborative

“*Becoming a Can-Do Leader* addresses the dichotomous relationship between leading and doing in a practical way that empowers managers to still do what they love while also building team capability. The can-do leadership approach offers a shift in leadership practices that is timely in the faster-paced, results-oriented world of business today.”

—David J. DeFilippo, EdD, *Chief Learning Officer, Suffolk Construction*

“Incorporating the can-do leader concepts and strategies into our management training has brought about a very positive measurable impact on the performance of our leaders and their teams.”

—Don Nusser, *VP and Manager of Learning & Development, Mott MacDonald North America*

“*Becoming a Can-Do Leader* stands out as a great how-to guide for those busy executives who both lead by doing and do by leading. I found it chock-full of useful insights and practical ideas and I’ll keep it on my desk for daily use.”

—Bill Wray, *Chief Risk Officer, Washington Trust Bank*

“Based on real-world practical experience, *Becoming a Can-Do Leader* is a valuable resource for getting things done. The strategies, tools, and learning culture presented in this quick read are valuable for all managers.”

—Paul R. Sullivan, *Founder and former Managing Director, Global Partners Inc.*

“*Becoming a Can Do Leader* employs practical solutions to problems from a variety of fields that reach beyond the particular context, putting theory into practice, addressing challenges drawn from real life. The book’s authentic distillation of complex strategies is a gift for player-managers in the new millennium.”

—Emmett P. Tracy, *MBA, PhD, Postgraduate Dean, Hult International Business School*

“The authors help managers become better leaders by providing useful ways to both develop their people and apply their professional expertise. A must read for managers at any level.”

—Alan Frohman, *Executive Coach Author, The Middle Manager’s Challenge*

“In a time when managers are being asked to do more and more, *Becoming a Can-Do Leader* provides them with practical methods to get the work done, develop their people, and continue to grow professionally. It can turn a frustrated manager into a fulfilled one.”

—Matt Nash, *SVP Marketing, national donor advised fund charity*

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FRANK SATTERTHWAITE AND JAMIE MILLARD

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Frank Satterthwaite's author photo courtesy of Heidi Gumula.

The Can-Do Spirit VITALS Checkup and Can-Do Leader TPL Leadership Style Profiler in appendix I and II, respectively, are adapted from Dimensional Leadership, LLC and Lexington Leadership Partners, LLC.

**ATD Press** is an internationally renowned source of insightful and practical information on talent development, workplace learning, and professional development.

ATD Press  
1640 King Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314 USA

**Ordering information:** Books published by ATD Press can be purchased by visiting ATD's website at [www.td.org/books](http://www.td.org/books) or by calling 800.628.2783 or 703.683.8100.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016954228

ISBN-10: 1-56286-992-2

ISBN-13: 978-1-56286-992-2

e-ISBN: 978-1-60728-117-7

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Printed by Versa Press Inc., East Peoria, IL

*Dedicated to our mothers, Emily Satterthwaite and  
Betty Millard, who brought us up to think can-do!*



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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to offer particular thanks to the following people and organizations for their contributions to our book.

Frank would like to thank:

- Johnson & Wales University for giving me the opportunity to experience what it is like to be a player-manager during my two-year stint as a professor in and director of their MBA program. And for giving me the encouragement to develop MBA courses based on the think TPL and VITALS checkup leadership models, which have evolved with Jamie's help into key strategies for converting player-managers into can-do leaders.
- I also want to thank my MBA students who have jobs as player-managers for providing me with feedback on how they have used the think TPL and VITALS checkup strategies in their own careers.
- I am particularly indebted to Everett Zurlinden who, as a lead engineer at a Fortune 500 corporation, helped me develop early versions of the think TPL model and profiler.
- And above all I want to thank my wife, Martha Werenfels. I have to admit that when I handed her the draft for our final chapter on how player-managers can become can-do champions, I did so with some trepidation. I was concerned because I knew that my wife, who is a partner in a highly successful Providence architecture firm, is a prime example of a player-manager who has become a high-profile can-do champion by using many of the strategies we highlighted in that chapter of our book. What a relief when she nodded her approval! She's also, I'd like to add, a champion wife and mom!

Jamie would like to thank:

- The U.S. Army, starting with my leadership experience as a West Point cadet and Army Ranger, and continuing with my tours of duty, which allowed me to experience firsthand the impact that can-do leaders have on unleashing the can-do spirit in others.
- The management consulting, executive coaching, and leadership training firms I have been fortunate to be part of, including KPMG and PwC (two of the Big 4, where I learned the intricacies of project management and re-engineering); CSC Consulting (where I helped global organizations manage large, complex organizational change); and especially Harbridge House (where I began my journey developing leaders worldwide at a variety of Fortune 100 companies across multiple industries).
- The many clients I worked with earlier in my career that gave me invaluable experiences in developing leaders, including Bayer MaterialScience, Draper Labs, DuPont, GE, IBM, PwC, Raytheon, Rockwell Collins, Rohm & Haas, Schering Plough, and the U.S. Navy.
- In particular, my more recent clients who have allowed me access to their leaders to test and refine many of the can-do leader concepts in this book, including Conti, EMC, KVH, Mott MacDonald, Nuance, VCE, and WEA Trust.
- The relationships I have enjoyed as a member of the Duke Corporate Education Global Educator Network; as an adjunct executive professor at Northeastern University; and as a professor at Hult International Business School.
- The late W. Edwards Deming, under whom I studied and applied his techniques at organizations like GE, Rohm & Haas Company, and Ford Motor Company. Deming taught me to challenge conventional thinking about the role of executives in shaping the organizational culture, processes, and systems of successful organizations.
- The numerous relationships with busy managers who were the basis of the many anecdotes and stories in the book. I've

disguised your names and situations a bit to protect your identity, but you know who you are, and I thank you. These cameos and anecdotes are provided not as scientific proof of the validity of our findings, but to illustrate how our concepts and strategies can be effectively used by player-managers on the job. We leave it to the readers of this book to decide for themselves how useful these can-do leader strategies can be for them—by giving them a try!

- My business partner and co-founder of Lexington Leadership Partners, Gus Murby, for his lifelong friendship, ongoing support, keen insights, and early help in developing and coining the term *purposeful multi-impacting*. Together, as the “Gus and Jamie show,” we continue to have a blast advising, engaging, developing, and often entertaining our clients with our Frick and Frack antics. We are united in the goal to help our clients achieve true business impact.
- And most important, there’s my true inspiration—my very patient, understanding, and encouraging wife and best friend, Ann, who is an awe-inspiring mom, co-owner of an exceptional early learning center, and also very much a can-do leader in her business and in her life! I look forward to continuing to share the can-do spirit with you!

Jamie and Frank would both like to thank:

- The Association for Talent Development for giving us the opportunity to meet each other in local chapter meetings, and for helping us test and refine our can-do leader concepts in ATD blogs, conferences, and other forums. It’s an honor to continue working with you to support the talent development profession.
- And, we would like to thank the supportive can-do staff at ATD, with extra kudos to our insightful editors Kathryn Stafford and Melissa Jones. And a special thanks to Ryan Changcoco, who kept us all on track throughout the process of publishing and promoting a new book with new ideas. You are, indeed, can-do champions!



# INTRODUCTION: TOO BUSY TO READ THIS BOOK?

Do you feel too busy to read this book because you are a manager who also continues to do hands-on work? We're with you! And we would be happy to show you how you can start getting a lot more done—both as a leader and as an expert in your field—and feel better about the situation you are in as a manager and as a professional.

We'll give you some strategies you can put to work immediately. So that, contrary to popular belief, you will discover that as a can-do leader you can:

- Become a more effective manager by selectively doing professional work with the people who report to you.
- Continue to grow professionally in your area of specialization while you are also a manager.
- Find the time to be successful at both leading your team and practicing your specialty.
- Attain a higher level of professional distinction and employability by taking on management responsibilities while continuing to do professional work.

But first you have to let go of conventional management thinking by making the can-do mind shift. We invite you to read on to see how to make this transformation to become a can-do leader. We'll be right there with you every step of the way.

## **A Can-Do Leader: What's With This Name?**

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Becoming a can-do leader sounds good, but this book is about much more than just being the kind of manager who can get things done. Of course,

in every chapter we'll share with you proven strategies for doing just that. But what we really want to show you is how to get things done in what has become a very difficult situation for many managers—having to be highly competent as both a leader and a doer—and to enjoy doing it.

If you find yourself saddled with leader-doer responsibilities and are not sure how best to proceed, you are most assuredly not alone. Today's knowledge-driven, cost-competitive work world is changing the way management gets done. People in management roles are increasingly being asked, told, or forced to be player-managers—hands-on leaders, who in addition to having formal management responsibilities, also continue to perform significant chunks of professional work that requires considerable technical-functional knowledge and skills.

This is happening because many organizations can no longer afford to promote their best talent to the leadership ranks and then allow them to focus exclusively on being managers. Their superior technical-functional skills, which typically take a long time to develop, are still very much needed for solving complex problems. And there's the danger that if they do not continue to do some hands-on work when they become managers, they will no longer have the knowledge they need to inform their management decisions.

There's also the brute fact that given the sharp focus these days on finding ways to cut costs, managers often find themselves expected to get the same volume of work done with fewer people. This translates to short-handed managers having to roll up their sleeves and do some of the work they would have liked to delegate. Like it or not, they, too, are becoming player-managers.

While the need for managers who are successful as both leaders and doers is very real today, this need is only likely to increase in the future. This translates to a really great career opportunity for both getting and keeping jobs throughout your career and becoming a star in your field. However, gaining a career edge will only happen if you know how to become an effective player-manager.

And that's where the trouble is. Management thinking hasn't properly caught up with the player-manager phenomenon. There are few

solid guidelines available to help player-manager practitioners. Further complicating the matter is conventional management thinking, which suggests that leaders who get involved in actually doing the work are not being effective as managers. This thinking is not helpful, not realistic, and particularly counterproductive for people who find themselves in player-manager roles.

If you are struggling with how best to proceed as a player-manager, you are not alone. Many others in a similar role are having similar difficulties. Fortunately, we're here to help you. We know from personal experience the pressures felt by incumbents of the player-manager dual role: Frank in an academic setting, functioning simultaneously for several years as both a professor in and director of an MBA program; and Jamie as an experienced leadership consultant and trainer who also had management responsibilities at KPMG, Harbridge House, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Computer Sciences Corporation, and Lexington Leadership Partners.

During our combined 50-plus years of coaching, training, and teaching managers, we have had considerable experience advising an increasing number of people who find themselves in management roles that involve doing as well as leading.

We'll help you succeed as a player-manager by letting go of conventional management thinking and becoming what we call a can-do leader. "Can-do" in the sense that selectively doing hands-on work as a manager becomes an effective strategy for both contributing your professional expertise and for becoming a better leader.

If you are willing to have a go at becoming a can-do leader (CDL), we will show you how to:

- Make the can-do mind shift by being a myth buster (chapter 1).
- Get the right stuff done by thinking TPL (chapter 2).
- Unleash that can-do spirit by checking VITALS (chapter 3).
- Enhance your leadership by selectively engaging in situational doing (chapter 4).
- Build a can-do team by using delegation that empOWERS (chapter 5).

- Keep improving by creating a can-do learning culture (chapter 6).
- Be a star with career security by becoming a can-do champion (chapter 7).

At the end of each chapter we include a summary called The CDL Playbook to help you master the winning strategies for becoming a can-do leader. A playbook is a sports concept we both learned at an early age; now that we are older, we still find that playbooks help, especially when it comes to mastering leadership skills.

Read on and you'll learn how in the process of becoming a can-do leader you can gain an added influence with your team and in your profession that transforms you from a "too-busy" player-manager into a highly employable leader in your field as a can-do champion.

# 1

## TO MAKE THE CAN-DO MIND SHIFT: BE A MYTH BUSTER

Join us and be a myth buster. A myth buster, that is, with regard to conventional management thinking that holds player-managers back. Consider this for a moment: How many times have people who have become managers heard some version of the following?

- Every time you do work you could have delegated, you're nothing more than the highest paid member of your team.
- If you are not delegating, you are not managing.
- Don't fall into the trap of continuing to do the particular things you really loved doing before you became a manager.
- If you can't let go, you are being controlling and not developing your people.
- If you keep getting caught up in the details of doing work you could have delegated, you'll be "thinking too small to think big."

However, when it comes to the actual practice of being a manager, how many times have many, if not most, managers considered some version of the following?

- The job must get done ASAP, and I am the one person with the expertise to get it done on time.
- I don't trust (or believe) that my people can get the job done on time with the right level of quality.

- I'm concerned that I'm losing my technical relevance because the professional knowledge and skills that I developed prior to becoming a manager are now atrophying.
- Isn't there some way that as a manager I can delegate most tasks, but still get productively involved in other tasks that I might have delegated?

Based on our experience training and coaching player-managers at all levels in a wide range of different situations, the answer to the last question is, most definitely, "Yes, you can." You can both delegate and do as a successful manager. In fact, selectively doing work you might otherwise have delegated enables you to keep up with important technical aspects of your chosen field. Selectively doing can also provide you with opportunities to become a better manager.

We call the misguided belief that if you are not delegating you are not managing the Myth of the Iron Law of Managerial Delegation. Disobeying this hallowed precept of management orthodoxy from time to time does not mean abdicating your managerial responsibility. Even managers who are very skilled at delegating find themselves in situations where this law needs to be bent.

Effective managers understand that focusing on delegating tasks, rather than doing these tasks, is necessary if they are going to get things done and develop their staff along the way. That said, there are times when getting things done properly and developing your staff can be better achieved by doing some tasks yourself rather than delegating all of them.

## **Some Reasons for Doing Instead of Delegating**

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Here are some situations where it can be very useful for you, as a manager, to get directly involved in doing work you might have delegated:

- **Leading by example.** Occasionally doing tasks you are still good at highlights your personal commitment to achieving a high performance standard. It also gives you the opportunity to demonstrate strategies and techniques that are useful for excelling at these tasks.

- **Assessing your team members' performance.** Working alongside your colleagues from time to time allows you to assess their on-the-job knowledge and skills so that you have a better idea of their learning gaps and how best to delegate to them in the future.
- **Building team capability.** Being right there with your team gives you opportunities to offer on-the-spot coaching and feedback in areas where you still have special expertise.
- **Improving your team members' morale.** Rolling up your sleeves and helping out when your team is stressed can help lift your team's spirits and increase their respect for you as their leader.
- **Determining if systems and processes are working.** Working alongside your team from time to time gives you the chance to observe firsthand if the way your team is organized is productive, and if your organization's infrastructure and support mechanisms are helping or hindering their ability to perform well.

Of course, you will have to keep in mind that doing work you might have delegated could backfire. When player-managers jump in to do tasks, with little regard for anything other than using their special expertise to get these tasks done properly, time is taken away from managing.

This can also have some unintended side effects that have a negative impact on their ability to lead a team. Team members may get the message that their manager doesn't think they're capable of learning how to do important tasks well, causing them to feel resentment and to become demoralized. They may even conclude that whenever an important task comes along they have to defer to their manager, who will jump in as the "expert" to complete it. This can set in motion an unintended vicious cycle—the more the manager jumps in and does things that the staff might have done, the more the staff becomes dependent upon the manager to do what should be their work. This is not a good way for leaders to manage their time.

Is the problem here the fact that the managers jumped in and did something they might have delegated without considering the potential

negative consequences? Perhaps, but not necessarily. More often than not, the real problem is that many, if not most, player-managers get so caught up in a traditional, “either I’m leading or I’m doing” mindset that they fail to see opportunities to address leadership issues while they are doing some of their team’s work.

## **Don’t Be Held Back by Either/Or Thinking**

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The either/or thinking associated with the Myth of the Iron Law of Managerial Delegation encourages people in player-manager roles to adopt the mindset of thinking in terms of, “either I’m leading others or I’m engaged in doing the work myself.” Framed this way, time spent doing professional work is time taken away from being a manager. And time spent managing is time taken away from doing professional work.

The zero-sum nature of this either/or mindset leaves player-managers feeling like they are never able to give proper attention to either their leadership role or their continuing professional responsibilities. Instead of feeling that they are growing and filled with a sense of future possibilities, they are more likely to feel frustrated, overwhelmed, and even guilty that they are not measuring up as professionals or as managers.

To take off the either I’m leading or I’m doing mental blinders, start by trying to use the kind of both/and thinking that will enable you to see that many activities associated with being both a professional expert *and* a manager are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Instead, they can be mutually reinforcing.

## **Too Much on Your Plate? Try Purposeful Multi-Impacting**

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When you are a leader who is doing some of your team’s work, the key is to be mindful of more than the negative impacts you want to avoid. You must also think about how you could help get the task done in a way that also advances your leadership agenda. We call this strategy purposeful *multi-impacting*—getting involved in an activity in a way that offers the promise of achieving more than one objective.

Purposeful multi-impacting describes a more productive way for player-managers to get things done than can be achieved by traditional multi-tasking. Purposeful multi-impacting works because:

- It is often more efficient than multitasking, which usually involves continually switching your attention back and forth between unrelated activities.
- Being aware of the potential positive and negative side effects of actions they might take helps can-do leaders identify good opportunities to advance their leadership agenda while doing tasks.
- Purposeful multi-impacting can be a way for can-do leaders to develop their team members while working alongside them.

Lee, an exceptional engineer, is a nice example of a can-do leader who makes good use of purposeful multi-impacting. Several years ago, he was promoted to the role of manager, but because of economic pressures and his strong engineering credentials, he was also directed to continue doing some of the engineering work. To get the engineering and management results he wanted, Lee decided to be very selective with regard to which engineering work he chose to do. Rather than simply jumping in to take on the tasks he used to like to do, he decided to look for work that gave him the chance to address some of his management responsibilities while also doing engineering tasks.

Following a purposeful multi-impacting leadership strategy, Lee did things like help a recently hired engineer, Joshua, who was behind schedule on an important new product design. Instead of taking over from Joshua to make sure the design was successfully completed, Lee worked alongside Joshua in a purposeful, multi-impacting way. These multi-impacts included:

- **Assessing people while doing.** Lee was able to directly observe Joshua's real, on-the-job skill set, which gave Lee a better idea of how he might make better immediate use of Joshua's skills. Lee also identified a new technical skill that Joshua could develop to be more useful to the team.

- **Sharing expertise with people while doing.** Lee identified opportunities to offer some on-the-job tips that would enable Joshua to complete assignments more effectively and efficiently in the future.
- **Building alignment while doing.** Lee shared war stories with Joshua as they worked together. This gave Joshua a much better idea of the kinds of things their company’s marketing people tended to like and dislike in new product designs. Shoptalk not only made Joshua feel more comfortable with Lee, but also reduced the possibility that Joshua would submit new product designs that were likely to be returned for very time-consuming reworks.
- **Assessing the needs of the work environment while doing.** After personally experiencing delays caused by out-of-date software, Lee realized that the expense of replacing the software with an updated package would be more than justified by the increase in his design team’s productivity.

Like Lee, if you find yourself saddled with both doing and leading responsibilities, try looking for opportunities to purposefully multi-impact. You might very well find that this will enable you to get more done in less time—and have some fun in the process.

## **The CDL Playbook**

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Here’s a quick review of the key strategies a can-do leader can use to make the can-do mind shift.

- **Bend the Iron Law of Managerial Delegation.** Be a myth buster and challenge the traditional notion that if you are not delegating, you are not managing. As a myth buster, you will be free to become more successful both as a leader and as a professional.

- **Don't be held back by either/or thinking.** Take off those either/or mental blinders and start using both/and thinking. You'll find that many activities associated with being both a professional expert and a manager can be mutually reinforcing.
- **Get more done by using purposeful multi-impacting.** Whether you are primarily engaged in leading or doing, continue to look for opportunities to talk and act in ways that purposefully achieve more than just one positive outcome.
- **Start enjoying being a can-do leader.** Enjoy taking advantage of the opportunities that come with being a player-manager who has learned how to get things done, and grow professionally as a can-do leader.

What's the next step? Want to be more targeted and successful when using a multi-impacting strategy to fulfill your management responsibilities? In chapter 2, we'll show you how thinking TPL can help you get the right stuff done.

**Buy This Book!**