

Praise for *Your Leadership Moment*

“The critical skill that leaders need today is the ability to work across lines of difference to create meaningful change that benefits everyone, not just the privileged few. *Your Leadership Moment* allows readers to build that skill through touching, provocative, and deeply human stories and its call for everyone, regardless of their circumstances, to choose to lead.”

—Jacqueline Novogratz, founder & CEO of Acumen

“An adaptive leadership truth-telling about defining moments of our times. A compelling read for people and companies who seek to challenge the status quo and survive.”

—Lauren Serota, head of performance & talent at Patagonia

“Eric lives leadership. From the intimate stories of his own life, to his pragmatic ability to hand people and groups what they need, to his deep love and commitment for a more just and generative world...we are lucky to have his contributions. *Your Leadership Moment* shares ideas everyone can use and a humanity we are all hungry for. Your sense of yourself and what is possible will be elevated on the other side of reading this book.”

—Alexander Grashow, author of *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*

“Just like one of Eric Martin’s adaptive leadership sessions, *Your Leadership Moment* takes you on a journey. You end up surprised to find yourself examining purpose, power, and identity with a renewed motivation to change your life, community, organization, and the world.”

—Bavidra Mohan, head of leadership at Acumen

“As a scientist, I share Eric Martin’s passion for tackling challenges at the interface of humans and the environment. I take heart in his pragmatic and systemic, yet human-centered, approach to leading adaptive change.”

—Dr. Sarah Elaine Lewis, senior director for innovation at The Sustainability Consortium

“Eric Martin combines relentless optimism with hard-nosed realism in powerful stories of people like you and me who saw a leadership opportunity and refused to sit on the sidelines. Each of us has the potential for a leadership moment. Reading this book will help you find yours.”

—Dr. Marty Linsky, faculty at Harvard Kennedy School & author of *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*

“Eric Martin invites us to consider the power of leadership moments to influence change both within and outside of corporate walls. Creating a sustainable future requires nothing less than each of us seizing these moments.”

—Euan Murray, CEO of The Sustainability Consortium

“Eric Martin has managed to put into writing what he so masterfully and authentically does in his life and work: make acts of leadership, fuelled by courage and compassion, accessible to all. This book has real heart and real tools for leaders. I’m excited to put its wisdom to use.”

—Molly Alexander, founder of MPA Global Advisors

“The perfect balance of evocative storytelling with practical leadership ideas. Democratizing leadership speaks to people across our social and political divides, and offers hope for healing a fractured nation.”

—Roger Sorkin, award-winning producer & executive director of the
American Resilience Project

**YOUR
LEADERSHIP
MOMENT**

Democratizing Leadership

**YOUR
LEADERSHIP
MOMENT**

in an Age of Authoritarianism

Eric R. Martin



Mango Publishing

CORAL GABLES

Copyright © 2020 by Eric Martin.

Published by Mango Publishing Group, a division of Mango Media Inc.

Cover Design & Layout: Roberto Núñez

Interior Graphics: David Carol

Mango is an active supporter of authors' rights to free speech and artistic expression in their books. The purpose of copyright is to encourage authors to produce exceptional works that enrich our culture and our open society.

Uploading or distributing photos, scans or any content from this book without prior permission is theft of the author's intellectual property. Please honor the author's work as you would your own. Thank you in advance for respecting our author's rights.

For permission requests, please contact the publisher at:

Mango Publishing Group

2850 S Douglas Road, 2nd Floor

Coral Gables, FL 33134 USA

info@mango.bz

For special orders, quantity sales, course adoptions and corporate sales, please email the publisher at sales@mango.bz. For trade and wholesale sales, please contact Ingram Publisher Services at customer.service@ingramcontent.com or +1.800.509.4887.

Your Leadership Moment: Democratizing Leadership in an Age
of Authoritarianism

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication number: 2020933926

ISBN: (print) 978-1-64250-267-1, (ebook) 978-1-64250-268-8

BISAC category code: BUS071000, BUSINESS & ECONOMICS / Leadership

Printed in the United States of America

For the unseen.

Table of Contents

Foreword	13
Introduction	
Standing in the Heat	16
Part 1	
Where to Begin?	24
Chapter 1	
Leadership Moments	26
Chapter 2	
If Anyone Can Do It, Why Doesn't Everyone?	34
Chapter 3	
Democratizing Leadership	41
Part 2	
What's Your Leadership Choice?	52
Chapter 4	
Breaking Ranks	54
Chapter 5	
Authority	63
Chapter 6	
Leadership	72
Chapter 7	
Recognize Your Leadership Moment	81
Part 3	
What's the "Work" of Leadership?	90
Chapter 8	
The People with the Problem Are the Solution	92
Chapter 9	
Recast the Work	101
Chapter 10	
What's Your Leadership Work?	113

Part 4	
Whose Leadership Work Is It?	122
Chapter 11	
Leading on the Verge of Schism	124
Chapter 12	
Mobilize Others	132
Chapter 13	
What's Holding You Back from Leading?	144
Part 5	
What Will You Let Go Of?	154
Chapter 14	
A Separate Self...for an Interconnected Whole	156
Chapter 15	
Authority...for Freedom	162
Chapter 16	
Knowing...for Becoming	167
Chapter 17	
Ready Yourself	173
Part 6	
A Hidden Wholeness	180
Chapter 18	
Acceptance	182
Chapter 19	
A Path Opens	190
Chapter 20	
The Purpose of Your Leadership Moment	200
Acknowledgements	206
About the Author	208
Endnotes	210

Start Close In

*Start close in,
don't take
the second step
or the third,
start with the first
thing
close in,
the step
you don't
want to take.*

Start with
the ground
you know,
the pale ground
beneath your feet,
your own
way to begin
the conversation.

Start with your own
question,
give up on other
people's questions,
don't let them
smother something
simple.

To hear
another's voice,
follow
your own voice,
wait until

that voice
becomes an
intimate
private ear
that can
really listen
to another.

Start right now
take a small step
you can call your own
don't follow
someone else's
heroics, be humble
and focused,
start close in,
don't mistake
that other
for your own.

*Start close in,
don't take
the second step
or the third,
start with the first
thing
close in,
the step
you don't
want to take.*

by David Whyte¹

Foreword

In October of 2018, I sat in a room in Ventura, California, with Patagonia founder Yvon Chouinard and our board of directors. Among line items on the agenda like budget, innovation, and governance was one that sparked curiosity and sent the mind into a flurry: mission statement. Two words with high gravity. A statement by which we measure success, derive our values, and hold each other accountable. A phrase to be echoed and imitated by large and small companies alike, and a north star for those starting their journey.

Since the early 1990s, Patagonia's mission has been one designed with inherent tension: *Build the Best Product, Cause No Unnecessary Harm, Use Business to Inspire and Implement Solutions to the Environmental Crisis*. Somewhat clunky, but profound. Lead with excellence, manage your mess, and bring others along for the ride. There are many businesses excelling at one or two of these principles, but our success is only activated if we achieve them in concert.

“The mission was progressive when we wrote it in 1992. Now it's old news. The planet is out of time, and humanity is out of time,” Yvon said. “We are in business to save the planet.” These words lit a spark. A discussion ensued—opinions traded, our existence questioned, consumerism villainized—and ended with a new mission: *We are in Business to Save Our Home Planet*. Yvon challenged the company's leadership, “How will the new mission change how you and your teams do your jobs?” There was some hemming and hawing...latent fear inherent with any change. And mostly, an absolutely electric energy leading to a collective, “Hell yeah.”

It took a while for me to digest the profundity of that conversation and the new mission. The compulsion of urgency. The confirmation

that all bets are off. The acknowledgement of the crisis at hand. And the license to be an agent of change for the company and for our home planet. I went back to my team and said, “Yvon changed the mission. Here’s what we’re here to do.” The question was *how* to do it. The answer, radical empowerment.

I’m lucky to have *innovation* in my title, but it must live everywhere in the organization. The next game-changing idea is as likely to come from an environmental tech start-up as it is from one of our retail associates. While the old mandate was “hire sport people,” the new one is “hire activists.” When you hire based on empowerment, you democratize leadership and build a network of awesome power. At Patagonia, every employee is empowered to think about their work differently. From IT to human resources, from marketing to logistics, from decisions about business cards to decisions about investing in renewable energy in our supply chain.

The environmental crisis is not waiting for a global or national leader to decide to act. The crisis will only be solved by a groundswell of leadership finding common stakes in plastic pollution, synthetic pesticide abuse, rising tides, and preservation of the wild nature we love. Leadership that takes full responsibility for its contribution to the crisis and rallies people at all levels. Leadership that can identify the right problem to solve, put decision-making in the hands of people who know best regardless of title or org chart, mobilize resources and support, and be willing to break ranks with the status quo.

Early in my career, I was a chance student of democratizing leadership. I never thrived under micromanagers, diminishers, or tyrants. A game changer for me was the chance I was given at W.L. Gore to oversee a product launch with the United States Marine Corps. For a while, I reveled in the opportunity to prove myself on a project with high visibility. I soaked in my own hubris and feeling

of elevation among my peers without acknowledging the gift of empowerment I'd just been given. I was confident in my abilities to succeed, but I undersold the challenges and personal risk others had taken to get me there. Now, as the leader of a large and diverse team that has *everything* to do with saving our home planet, I look for opportunities to empower my team members. The old adages “ask, don't tell” and “listen more than you talk” ring in my ears every time I open my mouth.

Radical empowerment is unleashing the collective potential of Patagonia. It is fostering an environment devoid of fear and emboldened by an ever-changing and ever more daunting goal. The choice before us every day is to question the status quo—to vigorously challenge any statement that starts or ends with “the way we've always done it.” The choice, in short, is to adapt. Saving our home planet requires nothing less.

Your Leadership Moment is radically empowering in the way it puts *you* at its center. It doesn't pretend to offer easy answers. Instead, it helps us see our own moments for leading meaningful change. Like Eric Martin, my own family includes first responders—humble paramedics and firefighters who know what it means to respond to crisis and care for others. *Your Leadership Moment* speaks to the business leader, the activist, and the firefighter in all of us. The part of us that stands ready to take a risk, step into the fray, and give all we've got to a mission that's bigger than ourselves.

—Matt Dwyer
Head of Material Innovation at Patagonia and Former Research &
Development Associate at W.L. Gore

Introduction

Standing in the Heat

We hope for better things; it will arise from the ashes.

—Motto of the City of Detroit, 1805

Some houses are known as firefighter killers. Dilapidated interior staircases and door frames, weakened from years of neglect or vacancy, combine with the brick exterior distinctive of homes from Detroit's gilded age to create unpredictable oven-like conditions. A firefighter from my old neighborhood once told me about his narrow escape from one of these killers. The campfire flames we were huddled around flickered across his face, reaching up to light the fresh cigarette dangling beneath his mustache. "I was new to the job," he began, "one of my first runs [fires]. A single-family home. I was charging down the hallway. Pitch black. Thick smoke everywhere. Completely surrounded by fire. Suddenly, someone grabbed me from behind, yelling 'Get out!' Before I knew it, I was midair flying out the front of the house. I found myself lying on the muddy, tangled grass, puking up smoke."

Now, here's a story I haven't heard before, I thought to myself. If you've hung around firefighters much, you can recite from memory whole repertoires of their stories, replete with long pauses and emphatic hand gestures. "Then I saw three more firefighters flying out the front door," he continued, the wrinkles around his eyes betraying

a fondness firefighters often felt toward my dad. “And behind them, Sergeant Martin. Your dad, the fire still raging behind him, tossed us out one by one before the fire took us all. That’s the day I learned what firefighting is all about.” The real work of a firefighter is not just putting out fires—it is to serve and protect people from harm, including, sometimes, protecting the protectors.

That fire was one of three hundred in the city of Detroit that night. One of eight hundred that weekend. One of 22,000 that year, 1984—the year when Detroit earned distinction as the “arson capital of the world.” Some of the fires were indeed arsons—people burning for kicks, or for insurance money, or to clear abandoned property. But not all. Cold winters and poverty combined with ill-maintained electric heaters to create accidental fires. Though, “accidental” is a misleading word. In fact, the fires were the natural, unfortunate result of economically destitute Detroiters trying to live as best they could behind boarded-up windows with no electricity, heat, or water and only a firepit to keep them warm.

To this day, the old-timers say my dad, Roger Martin, was one of the best firefighters the city of Detroit ever knew. A legend. A leader. For his fellow firefighters, he provided everything people expect from their leaders. Show them where to go—into the fire or out, up to the roof or down to the basement. Give them a clear job to do. Keep them safe. And know your stuff. Only later did I learn that these things have little to do with leadership. I also knew very little back then of my father’s reputation as a fist-fighter, not just a firefighter...and as a drinker.

My days were like those of every other kid growing up in the city. Wake up, walk to school, and stay out of trouble. On mornings when Dad arrived home from the firehouse, the city’s decay wafted into my bedroom in the form of the sweet scent of firetruck diesel and smoke from the previous night’s fires. It drew me half-asleep and blurry eyed

toward the thoroughly spent but satisfied man seated at the kitchen table, coffee in hand along with the day's newspaper and his trusted crossword puzzle book. I'd shuffle slowly toward his silhouette for my morning hug—backlit by the fiery sun rising through our kitchen window. "I love you," I'd say, to which he always responded playfully, "Not as much as I love you."

Other than the smoke and diesel, it's the stories I remember the most. Stories like the one I heard around that campfire. Stories that he and others told about raging, routine fires and predictable, near-death experiences. Stories about fellow firefighters—Black, brown, and white—storming the blazing homes of Detroit's Eastside where I grew up. Setting aside Detroit's fiery racism, if only momentarily, they got the work done and stayed alive while doing it. Many of the stories were horrific. But they were always punctuated with laughter—the coping kind of laughter in the arsenal of every first responder—and with a strong sense of brotherhood.

Detroit's motto, *Speramus meliora; resurget cineribus* translates to "We hope for better things; it shall arise from the ashes." It dates to 1805, when a great fire burned most of the city to the ground. Father Gabriel Richard, a French Roman Catholic priest, wrote these words in the hope that the city would rebuild. It reflected the spirit and resilience of the people, as well as a resolve that endures to this day. In the 215 years since, Detroit has undergone a tumultuous rise and decline. After peaking at the height of the auto industry in the 1960s, the city struggled with a shrinking population, dwindling tax base, and, ultimately, bankruptcy.

But Detroit was broken long before it went broke. It had been broken my whole life—a reality I was born into, learned to lament, but seldom questioned. It was a city with rising tensions between white residents and Black residents, who were often blamed for the arsons. Generations of redlining and racial hostility poisoned the city's well of

progress. Riots. “White flight.” Industry collapse. Corruption. Crime. We had it all.

Walking to and from school every day, I occasionally took note of street after street of unfolding neighborhood decay. Liquor stores sold alcohol to children, drug addicts, and prostitutes alike. Kids with nobody to watch them at home frequented fast food joints bent on cultivating deadly lifelong eating habits. Houses stood abandoned on every block, including eventually my own house. At one point, over 50,000 buildings stood vacant—about one out of every five buildings in the city. These vacant buildings, unwatched and unsecured, bred crime, vice, and devastating fires.

“The reason we put out fires,” I’ve heard firefighters say, “is you’re two feet away from someone’s whole life. Firefighters see themselves as being on the front lines with every blaze. If they don’t stop it, an entire street might burn.” Yet the fires kept burning, day after day, year after year, until it just became a way of life that few of us questioned. Left unaddressed, ignored, or denied, the underlying causes of the fires stole the lives, livelihoods, and sense of dignity from all of us. It’s funny how a place can go south right before your eyes, but you just don’t see it.

Not until I moved away, far away, from Detroit could I apprehend how far the city had fallen over the course of my lifetime. The descent was so gradual it was easy to miss. It was also easy to overlook the many false solutions that we white residents glommed onto to stymie the decay—politicians who promised to “get tough” on crime, neighbors who quietly pressured each other not to sell their homes to “the Blacks,” even as housing prices tanked, denial that somehow our own racism was part of the problem. There was also plain old it’s-not-my-problem apathy. “Just let the whole damned city burn down. Let the houses burn,” they’d say. “Let them [the Blacks] have it.” Clearly, that wasn’t the answer either. But what was the answer?

More to the point, what was the problem, and why didn't we have the courage to engage with it? Why weren't we able to see how our own racism as whites contributed to some of our fellow Detroiters having no option but to warm themselves with open fires in the basements of abandoned homes that set ablaze the hatred in firefighters' hearts? It's a vicious cycle that I've seen often in my work with organizations and communities alike. You think you're solving the problem, but you're only making it worse. Most of the time, however, the challenge was simply to stay alive. Blacks and whites alike. Residents and firefighters.

Strangely enough, the thought that Dad could die in the line of duty crossed my mind only once. That was when I saw the hole traced by a bullet clean through the brick façade of the Engine 18 firehouse where he spent most of his days. It exited six inches above his wireframe headboard in the upstairs barracks. The white firefighters blamed the Black Detroiters, as they always did, even while sharing meals with their fellow Black firefighters. But the Black firefighters and the neighborhood residents knew that one of the real culprits was racism in its many brutal, though sometimes subtle, forms that crippled us and kept us from working together.

Meanwhile, far outside the neighborhood, race-laced, political bullets were exchanged daily between the Fire Department and the Mayor's Office. The result was chronically understaffed and decommissioned firehouses. The otherwise routine and critical work of firefighting grew more difficult each year. We all grew increasingly unsafe in our own homes and in our own skin.

Whose job is it to lead change under these kinds of conditions? When the problems and solutions loom larger and far bigger than you. When your usual way of dealing with problems—your own version of putting out fires at work or in your private life—no longer suffices. When the people around you have accepted a less than optimal reality

but won't listen to reason. When the very people who are the problem also need to be part of the solution—if only they could be mobilized to see their own capacity to lead. Had I known the answer then as I know it now, Dad might still be alive.

Maybe I could've helped the city fix the conditions that caused people like my dad to turn to alcohol to numb the pain of living in decay. Probably not though, because the fires were a symptom of a decaying city, itself the symptom of a dying automotive industry, an eroding American middle-class, and growing economic inequity worldwide. Something else surely would've gotten him, like it did so many other Detroiters. In the end, the legend-that-was-Dad died, not in a fire, but by withering away from alcohol. It took a lot to kill him. Alcohol did what three near-death “firefighter killers,” three bouts of cancer, Vietnam, and a lifetime of risk-taking couldn't do.

When something is mundane to a child, they don't necessarily question it. So it was for me. The city's decline, the decline of Dad's health—both happening over decades—combined with declining home values to create a hopelessness that permeated my entire childhood.

As the fires burned and as I grew older, I longed for some smart person, somewhere, with power and know-how to fix our situation. Our mothers, our fathers, our elected officials, our president. Anyone. Had an authoritarian figure appeared with an “I'll fix it” arrogance and seductive ideas that could wall us off from the reality the automotive industry faced, they would've had my vote. It was probably this desire for straightforward answers that drove me to study engineering. My hope was to fix all the wrongs with just a bit more smarts, and perhaps, an innovative, technical fix of some kind.

If only I had understood that tackling this problem meant we'd all have to face our own contribution to the mess, that we'd have to change our own behavior, that we'd have to wean ourselves off

the automotive industry and the oil addiction it created, that we'd have to face the threat headlong. If anyone had the courage to seize leadership, I know in my heart, Dad would be alive now. Old but strong, hugging his grandchildren, cup of coffee and crossword book still at hand.



Both my life's work and *Your Leadership Moment* are dedicated to helping people lead change against all odds. My experience and deep belief is that anyone, anywhere, can lead change to improve their livelihood, their community or their organization. Over the past twenty years, I've come to know many Roger Martins, their daughters, their sons, and their colleagues in cities worldwide, in Appalachia, in the slums of Delhi and Nairobi, at Google, at major philanthropic organizations, and even in the White House. People—mostly good people—putting out fires as best they can, but often perfectly solving the wrong problems.

I've also seen some of these people rise above the fray. They've exercised leadership and successfully tackled the deeper, unaddressed challenges within their teams, within their communities, and within themselves. None of them are leaders in the conventional sense. Few have achieved worldwide fame. Yet each of them is mobilizing others, day in and day out, to tackle seemingly intractable and impossible challenges. Stories about their acts of leadership are ones I tell my own children. Stories like these are also ones that I know every person can be a part of through their own leadership moments.

Through these stories, my hope is to ignite a recognition of our deep similarities, despite our superficial differences. To understand why good people can be compelled to set fire to their own lives and act in hateful ways, why places like Detroit—once the “engine of

democracy”—can get it wrong, for all the right reasons. And, despite all of this, how people can, and are, maintaining resilience and hope on the winding road to creating meaningful change. With this recognition, and a practical framework for leading change, we can create the leadership needed at every level of our organizations and communities—not just at the top of them—to tackle the challenges afire in the world today.

These stories must be honest. I’ve chosen to share certain moments, and I’ve chosen, at times, to use language that may offend. I was faced with many tough choices about what to leave in, what to leave out, who to hold up, and who to call out. These stories are truthful and told with hope and love, however painful, with the intent to inspire others to step onto a new path.

As a child, there was very little I could do to stop the fires, but I learned to stand in the heat—and survive.