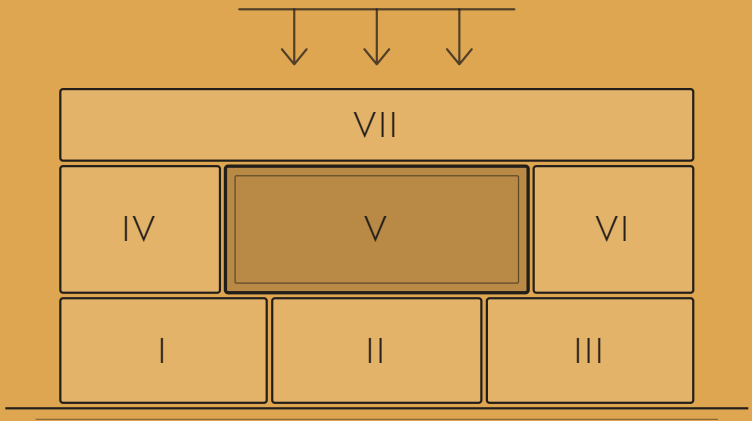

THE BUILT LEADER

Build the self. Serve the culture.

SCOTT STOJETZ

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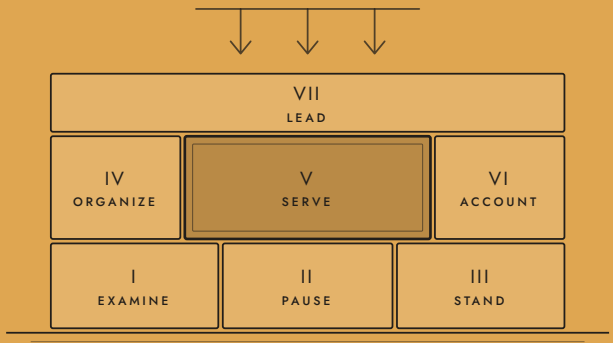
SEVEN STONES

Build the self as the foundation. Serve the culture on top of it, with service as the load stone that carries the weight. Lead caps the wall.



DEDICATION INTRODUCTION THE PRACTICES AT A GLANCE ABOUT THE AUTHOR

BUILD THE SELF *the inner work*

I EXAMINE
Every leader looks.

II PAUSE
Pausing is patient strategy.

III STAND
The deal goes south.

SERVE THE CULTURE *the work turned outward*

IV ORGANIZE
Order is not control.

V SERVE
Service is not weakness.

VI ACCOUNT
Account on a cadence.

THE CAPSTONE *the six become one verb*

VII LEAD
Walk the build.



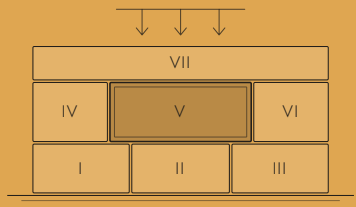
FOR TIM ARMELLI

my high school wrestling coach, and the greatest mentor of my life.

He taught me what the storm is, led me into it, and taught me how to stand in it and move through it with the highest integrity. With his process, he coached a dark horse with the tiger's eye to the Ohio state tournament; I would not have made that climb without his direct mentorship and his heart. I watched this man stand in the storm and lead many men through it, and in the leading, quietly build what I now know to be temples. His calm looked like humility; but his integrity was fierce — impenetrable, beyond deep, the fiercest I have ever known. He was the gateway to my spirit — I would not be the man I am without his heart connection to me.

Everything in these pages, I first witnessed in him.

You cannot run a culture you have not built in yourself.



INTRODUCTION

WHY THIS BOOK EXISTS

For thirty years I have worked inside American business, and for most of them I watched leadership performed instead of practiced.

I watched leaders talk integrity in the town hall and trade it away in the strategy room. I watched fear get dressed up as accountability, and ambition get dressed up as vision. I watched good people shrink under leaders who managed their own image more carefully than they managed their teams. I watched cultures that looked alive from the outside quietly rot from the top. And I watched what it costs — in talent that walks, in trust that never comes back, in the slow draining of meaning from work that could have meant everything.

I was good at that business. Top of the boards, record years. I am not writing this as someone the system spit out. I am writing it as someone who succeeded inside it and refused to mistake the success for the truth. And the truth is that much of corporate America is led by performers — and the people underneath them feel it every day, whether or not they have the words for it.

But I have also been led well — rarely, and unforgettably. A few men, across thirty years, who were aligned with me in values and in integrity, and who used their position not to manage me but to level me up. They helped me orient a career. They saw what I could become, named it, and then expected it of me. I would not be who I am without them. And part of why I can describe the better way this plainly is that I have stood in rooms with intentional leaders who lived it. The good ones are rare — which is exactly why they matter, and exactly why this book exists: to make them less rare.

Because the best of them understood something simple and profound: great culture is built on self-culture. A leader who has done the inner work learns from every interaction, and treats the intimate ones — mentor to student, seasoned to novice — as the responsibility they are. To help another person organize their thinking, orient their career, and form a clear view of how they want to operate and who they want to become is among the highest things leadership can do. The leaders who shaped me took that seriously. So do the ones this book is trying to build.

This book is about the alternative. It is about leadership that is integral — true, kind, compassionate, and clear-headed — not as a slogan painted on a wall, but as a way of being a person builds on purpose and runs every day, all the way down through a culture.

Let me be plain about one thing, because the culture has it backwards: kindness is not weakness, and clarity is not softness. A leader who tells the truth, serves before they sell, and stays steady when the room shakes is not the naive one in the building — they are the strongest person in it, and the rarest. People are starving for that leader. They will follow that leader through almost anything, because that leader lets them stop guessing which version of the boss is going to walk in today.

My first book, *Temple*, was about building the self — a self the noise can't move. This one is the next step: how a built self leads. How it builds not just its own steadiness, but a whole culture of wellness, hustle, and accountability by integrity. Because here is what no leadership seminar will tell you: you cannot run a culture you have not built in yourself. The work starts on the inside, and then it runs outward — through everyone you are responsible for.

What you are holding is not a theory. It is a guide, a map, a blueprint. It is built on six practices — Examine, Pause, Stand, Organize, Serve, Account — each small enough to begin tomorrow morning and large enough to remake how you lead. It is meant to be brief, so you will actually use it, and meant to be returned to, the way you return to anything you are trying to make a habit. It is for the leader who suspects there is a better way to do the work and is ready to build it.

Corporate America does not need more performers. It needs more people willing to stand — in their integrity, in their kindness, in their clear-headed care for the human beings in front of them — and to lead from there, on purpose, every single day.

That is why this book exists. The rest of it is how.

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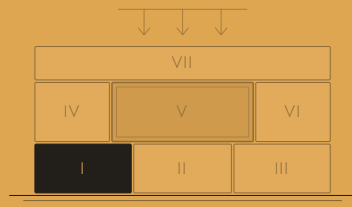

CHAPTER ONE · BUILD THE SELF

EXAMINE

Every leader looks.
Some are watching, judging, categorizing.
The built leader examines.
The integral leader sees and puts it into service.

Examine is where the build starts. Before you can stand, before you can serve, before you can lead a single soul, you must be able to see — clearly, honestly, without flinching. A leader who cannot examine cannot build, because they are building on ground they have never actually looked at. Everything downstream inherits whatever they refuse to see.

And examining is not the same as looking. Everyone looks. Most leaders look constantly — at the dashboards, at the people, at the room — and see almost nothing, because looking is passive and examining is a discipline. To examine is to discriminate: to tell good materials from bad, true motive from false, the real state of your culture from the story you have been telling yourself about it. Most of us were never taught this. We were handed information and told it was the same thing. It is not. You can drown in information and still be blind.

And examination is done from one place: the witness. Detached. Unemotional. Emotion is the enemy of a clean read — it edits the picture before you can see it, flattering the people you like and condemning the ones you don't. You step back from the feeling and into the witness, the still observer that can look at a hard situation without being pulled into it. This is the same steadiness the rest of this book is built on, turned toward seeing: you feel nothing while you look,

precisely so that what you find can be trusted. There is no emotion in examine. There is only what is truly there.

This is not a modern idea. It is one of the oldest in the wisdom traditions. When a person of wisdom faces a hard choice, they do not react in the noise of it — they withdraw to a silent place and examine, calmly and without emotion, what the next frame is actually asking of them. Jesus went into the wilderness. Gandhi kept his days of silence. The sages of the Upanishads, when a real question came, went quiet, went inward, went deep — and came back on the other side in total clarity. Examination is that retreat, brought into leadership. You do not have to climb a mountain to do it. But you do have to get still enough, and detached enough, to actually see.

EXAMINE YOURSELF FIRST

This is the hardest mirror, and it is non-negotiable, because you cannot audit a team through an unaudited eye. Before you examine anyone's work, examine your own — honestly. Are your own expectations being met, starting with the ones you set for yourself? Are your commitments kept? Are you integral in the work, or carrying a quiet story about how hard you are working that the actual record would not support? A leader who will not run that audit on themselves has no standing to run it on anyone else. The eye has to be clean before it can see.

THE BOTTOM OF THE BAG

Before any sales call, I examine. I research the surgeon, and I create a game plan — not a pitch, but a set of good questions, the ones that show me where we might collaborate to advance patient care with the technology we carry. That preparation is examination, done in advance. On this particular call, the account belonged to my partner — a long-standing relationship of his — so I let him lead and rode as the wing man. And I made my first mistake before we ever walked in: I trusted that he had examined, and I did not do my own. You cannot outsource the looking. I did, and it cost us.

Inside, it went sideways. My partner threw everything against the wall — rolling through product after product on a customer he was sure he knew — and the surgeon's attention dropped to nothing. Nothing was landing. So I interrupted, turned to the surgeon, and asked him a real question — about his approach, about the technology he regularly used. A discussion opened. I asked more. And in a few minutes of honest questions I learned what an hour

of pitching never would have: he would never use the technology we had come to sell him, because his surgical approach was different, and frankly more advanced. My partner did not know his own customer — and neither of us had examined enough to find that out before we sat down.

That is the cost of skipping examination on the front end: you walk in unprepared, and unprepared is just unexamined wearing a suit. But the call was not the end of it. The real work happened that night.

I went home and walked the whole thing back, without emotion — the dynamics, my own performance first, then the team's, then the surgeon's reactions, the exact moment his attention left the room. And that clean replay surfaced something the failure had buried. Somewhere in the conversation, the surgeon had mentioned an older product — one we kept at the very bottom of the bag, one I had parked there myself because it had stopped getting any play in the market. He liked it. He had used it. And he told us, plainly, why.

In the noise of a bad call, that comment would have been lost. Examination is what caught it. I built a brand-new plan around it — a way to reintroduce that old product into this surgeon's specialty, a space we had never even tried it in, a play the whole team could run. A failed call became information, the information became a strategy, and the strategy opened a lane to revenue we did not have that morning.

That is what examination is for. Not to sit in what went wrong — to see it clearly enough that it hands you the next frame. Examine before, or you go in blind. Examine after — walk it back, without heat, and look honestly at the dynamics, your performance, the team's, the customer's reactions — and even a failure will give you something to build with. The past is not there to be regretted. It is there to be read.

THE WALK-BACK

What I did that night has a name. The walk-back is one of the sharpest tools examination gives a leader. Take a call, a relationship, a partnership, a project, a quarter — and walk it backward, from today to day one. Lay the commitments each party made next to the work each party actually did, side by side, the way you would finally read a balance sheet you had been avoiding. Do it without heat. The aim is not to assign blame; the aim is to see. The picture a walk-back produces is almost always clearer than the one you carry in your

head, because the head edits and the record does not. Once you have seen that plainly, you do not have to argue about it. You know — and you can act.

EXAMINE THE WORK, NOT THE ROOM

Teach yourself to do this on purpose, early and often — not only in hindsight, after something has already gone sideways. Examine by the record, not by who is loudest or warmest in the room. Whose commitments are kept? Whose work actually moves the thing forward, and whose motion is performance? Find the builders and find the performers — every team has both — and refuse to confuse charisma for contribution. This is the discrimination the practice trains: true motive from false, real building from the appearance of it.

EXAMINE THE LEADERSHIP TREE

For a leader of leaders, this is the most important examination of all — and the one most often done wrong. The people leading people on your behalf are where your highest leverage lives, and your greatest danger, because a single bad leader does not damage one relationship. They damage everyone beneath them, quietly, every day, until you examine.

And most senior leaders examine their leaders by the wrong measure entirely. They look at a leader's own numbers, their polish, their charisma in the room — and they miss the only thing that matters at that level: how that person leads. Do not grade a leader on their performance. Grade them on their people. Are their teams empowered, or afraid? Are their people well? Are they hustling — running through walls — for a leader who makes them feel seen and built? Or are they quietly shrinking, managing up, waiting it out? The team is the report card. A leader whose people are thriving is doing the work, whatever their personality. A charismatic leader whose people are diminished is a rotten apple, no matter how good the slide looks.

Find the rotten apples and find them early. The cost of a bad leader compounds — the longer one sits in your tree, the more good people they quietly cost you, and the more your culture absorbs their permissions. Examination is how you catch it: not by who performs in front of you, but by walking down into their teams and seeing, honestly, whether those people are well, and whether they are running.

EXAMINE AS A CULTURE

A culture that examines stays honest about its own real state. It asks the standing question, continuously, and answers it without flinching: are our people well? Are they hustling? Are they positioned to do both? That is not a once-a-year review. It is a way of seeing that runs all the way down — leaders examining themselves, examining their leaders, teams examining their own work — so the truth of the place is always known, and never allowed to quietly drift.

Examination gives a leader more than a read on any one situation. It gives a way to hold trust — not cynicism, clarity. You learn to step back, with anyone, and check the same things on a cadence: are expectations being met; are commitments being honored; is the work integral. You can respect people fully and still examine the work; the two are not in conflict. And it teaches you where real trust is earned — in the open, by the same honest looking, again and again. Done this way, examination does not make you bitter. It makes you clear. It is what lets you close a frame that is finished and step cleanly into the next, carrying what the looking taught you instead of the weight of what went wrong.

THE CUE

Before you build anything — a plan, a team, a quarter, a partnership — stop and examine. Look at the real, not the story. Start with yourself. Then look at the work, then at the leaders carrying it. You cannot build what you refuse to see.

THE PRACTICE

EXAMINE

Seeing clearly is a discipline, not a gift. You train the eye on small things so it is sharp when something large is on the line. Run these.

1. **Audit yourself first.** Before you assess anyone, ask the hard questions of your own week: were my commitments kept? Were my own expectations met? Was I integral in the work, or just busy? Clean the eye before you use it.

2 **Judge the record, not the room.** Charisma is loud; contribution is quiet. Once a week, set the personalities aside and look at what actually got built, and who built it. Warmth is not work.

3 **Grade your leaders by their people.** Don't measure a leader by their own numbers or polish — measure them by the team beneath them. Are those people well? Are they empowered? Are they running through walls? The team is the report card.

4 **Find the rotten apple early.** A bad leader's damage compounds. When you sense one in your tree, walk down into their team and look honestly — then get to it. The longer it sits, the more it costs.

5 **Tell information from knowing.** You can have a hundred dashboards and still be blind. Ask of any number or report: what is this actually telling me about the real state of things — and what am I avoiding looking at?

6 **Examine from the witness.** Step back from the feeling before you look. Emotion edits the picture — it flatters the people you like and condemns the ones you don't. Detach, observe, and let what is actually there be what you find.

7 **Do the walk-back.** Now and then, take a relationship or a project and walk it from today back to day one. Lay the commitments and the actual work side by side. The picture will be honest even when the room is not.

You cannot lead what you will not look at. Examine, and the building has a foundation. Refuse to, and everything you stack is stacked on a guess.

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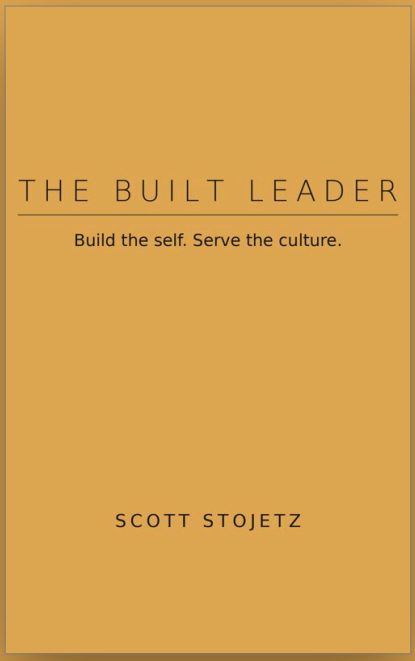

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