

FLAME

LET'S LIGHT THE WORLD



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Message



Friends,

We cook our food and feed a family with a FLAME.

We light the way in the midst of darkness with a FLAME.

We honor fallen champions and heros with a FLAME.

When we spark a FLAME within our community, our businesses, relationships, and everyday communication, we see results that are profitable, enjoyable and victorious.

F.L.A.M.E. or Faith, Love, Appreciation, Motivation, and Empathy, change the course of the things that matter most in our lives both personally and professionally. We empower our own success and that of those around us when we go to business and life with F.L.A.M.E.

I encourage you to pour into others, and allow wisdom and value to pour into you through the lens of FLAME. Now, please enjoy this edition of FLAME, which is powered by Collaborative Solutions Group, our supervising editor Christina Bartolotta, and all of our amazing contributors!

About CSG

Personal and professional growth only happens after YOU start growing. Taking action is key when your expectations are to fully develop skills and enjoy meaningful results. There are six core elements that we focus on to help you grow into the best version of yourself. These elements do not exist on their own. Each element influences the others and how you balance these interactions is vital to personal growth...

Opportunities For Growth

1. Growth Events:
2. CSG Private Coaching
3. Club CSG –Group Coaching
4. CSG Online
5. AIM
6. The Master Within
7. Solutions From the Huddle
8. Critical Strategy Guide

FAITH



It's the Little Things

Recently, I stopped by one of our outstanding Lake Norman restaurants and I spied the owner who was checking on some of the tables. Eyeing me, he made his way over, and at my invitation pulled up a seat. The pandemic has been tough on many of our businesses and the hospitality industry has certainly felt its savage impact.

I asked about his business and he shared that while things had indeed been difficult, he had a great team. The owner pointed out that any one on the team who falls short in their impeccable service could result in a less than satisfactory experience for his customer. The pleasant hostess who gets you seated, the waitress or waiter who takes your order, ensuring your meal is just the way you wanted it, are keys to a great meal.

The chef or cook in the kitchen play a critical role as does the washer, making sure your plates, silverware and glasses are clean and spotless. Just one falling short could not only lead to a bad experience for the customer but a disappointing review on *Yelp or Google for the restaurant*.

On my way back to the office I stopped by the paint store to pick up a gallon of red paint that I was going to use to paint our old family barn. I was looking at various shades, when the salesman walked up and advised me that the red sample I was glancing at would fade outdoors over time leaving me with a pink barn! He then went over the various pigments and paints which would stand up to the elements and time without peeling or fading.

Mixing up the paint he reviewed the brushes to use and how to clean things up. Before he rang me up, he reached over, grabbed a card that he scanned to provide me a discount on my new purchases. I thanked him and headed back to the office.

The next day, I busied myself at the farm, painting the old barn using the new red paint I was provided. Gliding the brush over the aged planks, I thought about my conversations with the restaurant owner and the paint salesman. How important a great employee is to the success of the business and whether you ever walk through their door again.

It reminded me of a story I heard many years ago. As the story goes, some young student is breezing through a pop quiz his high school teacher has presented. The student is flying through the quiz until he gets to the last question, "What is the first name of the woman who cleans the school?" The student recalled he had seen the cleaning woman several times. She was tall, dark-haired and in her fifties, but how could he possibly know her name?

It's the Little Things

The student handed in the paper, leaving the last question unanswered. However, before class recessed, another student inquired if the last question would actually count toward the test grade. "Absolutely," said the teacher, adding, "In your careers you will meet many people. Everyone is unique and significant. They deserve your attention even if all you do is smile and ask how they are."

It doesn't take much time out of the day to thank those who help you along the way. Quite a few serve in thankless jobs but make our task easier.

Remembering the story, I thought about how the restaurant owner recognized the critical role each and every employee plays in the success of that business and he was very appreciative of the team he had built. While the paint salesman and the cleaning lady may not own the business or have a child in the school, each played a very important role. Left to my own selection at the paint store, I might have ended up with a pink barn in just a few short years. But the salesman went that extra mile to make sure I purchased what I needed and would return, not merely a satisfied customer, but thrilled with his outstanding service.

I smiled thinking I needed to remember in the years ahead, to slow down and keep in mind – it's the little things. Each of us need to take a moment to thank those who make our jobs, and our lives, a little bit better.

And the salesman? His name was Dan ... and Dan, well .. he simply saved my day!



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LOVE



How Gratitude Can Change Your Life

A few years ago I was super down in the dumps. I didn't want to get out of my bed. A good friend suggested that I buy a Gratitude journal and every morning and at the end of every day, write down the things that I'm thankful for. She said it would change my life. When I started it wasn't easy. But little by little my whole attitude changed!

So now, every morning when I wake up the first thing that I do is to sit down with my gratitude journal and write out my morning gratitude list. It always starts with, "Today I Am Grateful For" The funny thing? Each morning when I write out my gratitude list, I realize just how much I *do have to be grateful for*. *It starts my day out right. No chance of a bad day because I have so much!*

There are things that we all take for granted — almost like given truths in our lives. Whether it's the roof over our heads, the food on our plates or the clothes on our backs, it's there and we always expect those things to be there.

I start with things more basic than that, I'm grateful for the air that I breathe, for the heart beating blood in my chest, for the organs in my body, for every living cell and fiber that are functioning towards my survival, I am grateful. We forget about those things from time to time. Until of course these things come into jeopardy.

Gratitude can change your life because it makes you appreciate what you have rather than what you don't have. A good friend of mine in Texas used to tell my daughters, "How can you ask for more when you don't really understand how much you already have."

Gratitude can change your life because it is the single most powerful source of inspiration that any person can tap into if they simply just stop and pay attention to the simplistic beauty and miracle of life.

Maybe I'm in the minority when I say that gratitude can change your life. Maybe I'm part of the select few voices out there who really know, deep down inside that a transformational shift can occur when you become utterly grateful for everything in your life, even your problems. Or maybe not.

Maybe lots of others out there hear the little voice inside their heads about needing to be grateful, and just maybe... maybe they don't follow that advice. But I will tell you this — having true gratitude for things has completely changed my life. I transformed from a cynic and a pessimist, doubting everything, into a positive-thinking junkie, fueled by the momentum of deep-down appreciation for all things.

Wherever you are with your mindset, the importance of gratitude cannot be under-

How Gratitude Can Change Your Life

estimated. There are specific reasons why gratitude can change your life, and if you listen to them and truly hear the message beyond the words, there are some incredible things that will begin to happen for you over time.

I'm a real-world testament to the truth in all of this — a living, breathing example of how gratitude can shift your life, creating monumental results. But don't just take it from me. Some of the most successful people in the world live by this school of thought. They believe, deep down inside, that the pathway to success, whatever definition that might take on for you, is through an ever-grateful attitude for what you have today, right now, in this very moment, rather than what you're lacking.

Being grateful, puts you into a state of abundance. It instills the belief that you're thankful for what you have, right now, in this very moment, rather than worrying about what you don't have or won't have at some future point in time. Often, we save our gratitude for one day of the year — Thanksgiving. On that day, we question ourselves for not being grateful every other day of the year.

And why not? Why can't we be grateful every day of the year? Why does it take a day that's slated for giving thanks for us to stop and actually do so? We can completely abolish much of our fears by being grateful every single day. Decide, right now, that you'll create the daily habit of gratitude and write out everything you have to be grateful for, and watch as your fears dissipate over time.

Gratitude shifts your focus — One of the reasons why gratitude can change your life is because it shifts your focus. You see, life is all about focus. Whatever we focus on, we move towards. When we live in a state of lack and negativity, we see more of that. It's easy to see something in a negative light when you're focused on that. It's easy to see all the problems and dilemmas surrounding a situation when your thinking is geared towards that.

It's also easy to see things in a positive light, even when problems arise. If you've ever met an always-positive person, you know just how true this statement is. Even when something goes wrong, they look for the silver-lining in the situation. If they can't find one, they simply state that something good will eventually come out of whatever they're going through.

But it's not just about being a positive person; having gratitude can change your life because it breathes positivity into everything you're doing. It's a huge shift in focus, a new way of seeing things, one that involves a wild-eyed appreciation for the beauty of all things. You move from living in a state of lack, to living in a state of sheer abundance in every possible way.

Still, this doesn't happen overnight. This shift in focus requires time and a habitual

How Gratitude Can Change Your Life

retraining of the mind. But it does occur. You can move from a negative state to a positive state by recounting all of the things that you have to be grateful for on a daily basis and writing it down. The key is to write it down. Writing it makes it more real rather than abstract concepts living in your mind.

It improves the quality of your life - From your mental health and wellness, to your emotional, spiritual and your physical strength can all be gathered from the simple and basic behavior of gratitude. Gratitude can change your life by literally improving the quality of it. You're the sum of all your parts, and it's gratitude that can help to benefit each of those small parts.

Studies have uniquely linked gratitude with satisfaction of life and it's no secret that people who are grateful for things have more joy in their lives. There's a sound stability that exists when you can appreciate the importance of things in your life, no matter what shape, size or form factor they might take on.

However, many people chalk this up to being successful. They think that it's easy for successful people to be grateful because they have so much to be grateful for. Well, this isn't about success, money, jobs, cars, houses, or anything else. Do these things help to improve the quality of your life? Sure. Maybe. But money can also mean more problems.

Gratitude isn't about having lots of money; gratitude must come before gaining. When it doesn't, people can go off the rails. There's something called Sudden Wealth Syndrome that can set in, and it's easy to see why so many lottery winners and inheritance receives go bankrupt in a very short period after the windfall of cash arrives.

Being grateful makes you feel happier - One way that gratitude can change your life is by making you happier. Studies have confirmed that having gratitude does in fact make you feel happier. Two psychologists, Dr. Robert A. Emmons from the University of California, and Dr. Michael E. McCullough from the University of Miami, have committed much of their research careers to studying the effects of gratitude.

In one study, the researchers asked a group of people to write a few sentences every week about a particular topic. One group was instructed to write about things that didn't make them happy. Another was instructed to write about things that they were grateful for. And the control group was instructed to write about things that had occurred but with no focus towards being positive or negative.

The results? The group that was instructed to write about things that they were

How Gratitude Can Change Your Life

grateful for were far happier and optimistic about their lives than the group that had focused on the negative parts of their lives. When we're grateful for things, it's a natural occurrence to be happier about life. You realize the things you have rather than the things you don't.

Having gratitude reduces your innermost fears - By being grateful, fear can be overcome. When we're utterly grateful for everything we have, including our problems, fear has little place to live in our minds. When we're fearful of things that put us into a state of scarcity, such as not having enough money to pay our bills or put groceries into our fridge, we're living in a state of lack rather than a state of abundance.

It strengthens and enhances your faith - Gratitude can transform your life by strengthening and enhancing your faith. Whatever faith or religion you believe in, whether it's God, Allah, Buddha, or even that spiritual oneness that binds us to each other for all you agnostics out there, gratitude can strengthen and enhance your faith and belief in whatever school of thought you subscribe to.

There's a deep-rooted appreciation for things that arise for those that are grateful. In fact, it becomes baked into the very fabric of their being. In turn, it strengthens their faith and belief in all things. For me, it's my belief in God and the realization that I am truly and completely grateful for everything in my life, including all my problems.

Gratitude transforms your faith by instilling the belief that you're not alone and that whatever it is that you're going through, it will pass, and on the other end you'll emerge victorious. You'll accomplish your goals, overcome your obstacles, and become a better person, one who's more sympathetic and even empathetic to the plight of others.

As a result of all of this, you'll seek out ways you can contribute to society and your fellow man, woman and child. You'll search for opportunities because you realize that what you have truly is enough and that the focus must become helping others. That's when true spiritual enlightenment begins.

Gratitude gives you piece of mind - There's an inner belief that develops when you're truly grateful for things. It provides a sound piece of mind, the kind that doesn't exist when you live with the expectation of certain things. If you've ever noticed people who expect certain things out of life, or who attempt to bend the will of others for their personal advancement, you'll find feeble-minded individuals who don't get far.

How Gratitude Can Change Your Life

There's a respect that develops for those that can stay humble, even while enduring the meteoric rise to success, fame or stardom. Humility is definitely one of the prevailing qualities of many of the most successful people in the world because they've had to endure and recover from the heartache and pain of failure and defeat.

They've become grateful by not taking things for granted because they've lived that other life and have had to wade through seas of pain. There's a certain humility and empathetic nature that's instilled in the hearts of successful people who had to endure a lot of failure before tasting the sweet victory of success.

But it all started with an attitude of gratitude that helped to instill a sound piece of mind. It was from that platform that success was developed. Not through the expectation of things. Not through cunning deceit or treacherous behavior. Through good will, positive vibrations, and the desire to add value to the world by first being grateful, no matter what.

It emboldens you to reach for your goals - I believe wholeheartedly in the art of goal setting. When you set goals the right way, you can achieve anything you put your mind to. Not overnight, or in a few weeks or months, but in years of consistent and persistent action. And one of the ways that gratitude can change your life is by emboldening you to reach for those goals.

Gratitude helps you to succeed by first creating a platform of internal success. As long as you're happy, healthy and sound in your mind, body and spirit, you can reach for your goals without too much external distraction. But, when you lack these things because you're unhappy with your current state of affairs, you live in that state of negativity and lack, and it's harder to push forward.

Create a platform of gratitude by building this habit in the morning. Interweave it into your early-morning routine by writing down, on paper, for just 5 minutes, everything you have to be grateful for. No matter how small it might be, even if it's just the mere fact that you're six feet above ground, write it down and embody that feeling.

That's how gratitude can truly change and transform your life. But it doesn't happen overnight. Nothing ever does.



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*enjoy
the
little
things*

APPRECIATION

I Choose to be Thankful

As small business owners can attest, COVID has definitely thrown a number of wrenches our way over the past year. I've had clients that have floundered and gone out of business. My ability to network and build the relationships that my business relies on for new business has taken a hit.

I know in these challenges I am not alone. Many businesses and individuals have similar stories to tell. But overall, my own business hasn't suffered too badly. It turns out that in a global pandemic businesses are more mindful of their online presence and are relying on them right now, more than ever, and for that I feel blessed.

It would be really easy to look at all of the negative in COVID and really be down. I've lost friends. I've watched as friends and relatives couldn't visit with loved ones that were in pain or say goodbye to loved ones before they passed. I've seen a lot of businesses really impacted negatively by the pandemic.

Every day I see angry posts on social media. People that are angry about what the government is doing, angry about what the government isn't doing, and not just at the government, angry at neighbors and their community too.

When we are angry, we are focused on all of the negative things going on around us. That cartoon image of a dark storm cloud over us is actually a very apt analogy. We can't see through the tempest of negative emotions to see the sun and light beyond it.

After seeing the turmoil and pain that the pandemic has brought to us, it isn't difficult to be angry or at least upset. I'll admit, after I lost a friend to COVID, I had a few dark days where the storm clouds were pulled down a little more snuggly over my head.

But the things that always pulled me out of the storm were the family and friends around me. I'm more grateful for what I have and who I have in my life today than I have been at any other point in my life.

It really became clear to me that anger and frustration are a choice in how we respond. If they are a choice, then so is gratitude.

It is from that gratitude that I have shaped how I am responding to COVID as a business and as a person. When customers have come to me asking for a price break or to put their services on hold while they have been essentially out of business, I am grateful that that I have built a relationship with my clients that is strong enough where they feel comfortable having that difficult conversation with. I even had one customer who is essentially still closed ask for help to transition their business online, but asked

I Choose to be Thankful

for a way to spread out the payments on that work until they could re-open.

Every customer that has approached me, I have said yes to. No questions asked. No asterisks. No limitations. If they needed some sort of assistance that my business could provide, I said yes. Some I continued to provide limited services for. Others I deferred billing for. Some I discounted their rates.

I've been lucky, going through all of that, of the customers that were struggling that reached out, all but one has come back. I lost more customers that didn't speak up.

So, it is with both empathy and gratitude that my business has approached COVID. I am thankful for where I find myself and who I have around me. I am thankful for being in a position to be able to help some people that have needed it.

Being thankful and grateful has made it much easier to see through the dark storm clouds that the pandemic has shrouded much of our lives in.

Choose to be thankful for what and who you still have in your life not angry at what the world has taken away.



Matt Swanson is the owner and founder of [MS Digital Solutions](#), a digital marketing agency that focuses on helping businesses make the most of their digital footprint. 15 years in the media industry and experience a variety of marketing roles has prepared Matt for helping businesses understand the possibilities and processes of a strong digital presence. Matt is married to Jen, his wife of 19, and together they have 1 son, Ryan, and live in Mooresville NC.

MOTIVATION

A dark, atmospheric scene featuring a road leading towards a bright horizon. Bare trees stand on both sides, their silhouettes sharp against a hazy sky. A bright, glowing beam of light illuminates the center of the road, creating a sense of forward movement and hope.

Setbacks

OK, reality check, you set some goals or changes you wanted to make in January and now things have stalled, or you have given up completely. The committee inside your head is telling you that you are a failure, you never achieve what you want, and on and on. Here are some reasons why this happens to us.

- You don't make our goals a priority. It's easy to say you want to make a change but to actually do the work is much different. You have to decide what kind of priority you're going to give our goals. If you don't, our intention will get lost with all our other daily activities.

You should identify one step you're going to take every day and put it in your calendar. You're more likely to go to the gym, apply for a job, or spend one hour researching our new business idea if you establish a time to do it.

- Sometimes you underestimate how hard it will be. Tackling a new goal is easy but sticking to it is hard. Assuming it will be easy can allow us to not take a look at all of the work you need to put in to achieve our goals.

You shouldn't confuse overconfidence with mental strength. Instead of telling yourself, it's going to be easy, you should remind yourself you're going to need to work hard to achieve your goals, despite whatever skills and talents you already possess.

- **You view mistakes as failure.** You need to accept that progress rarely comes in a straight line. Sometimes, people think one temporary setback means they've gone all the way back to square one, which causes them to give up.

You should give yourself grace and realize that you are going to mess up sometimes. Instead of declaring yourself a dismal failure, you need to use your energy to create a plan to get back on track.

- You sabotage yourself just before the finish line. The fear of success can be a real problem. And if you're not careful, you might sabotage yourself before you reach your goal. Perhaps you don't believe you're worthy of success or maybe, you are afraid someone is going to take it away from you.

The way to stop this is to think about past goals you've struggled to reach or those you've failed to attain. You should be honest with yourself about your feelings and be on the lookout for warning signs that you might be ready to quit.

- **You may be setting your sights too high.** If you are super excited about

Setbacks

changing your life, you might be tempted to set the bar really high. If you take on too much too fast, you set yourself up for failure.

Focusing too much on a big goal can be overwhelming. As the old adage goes: How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time! Set short-term objectives and celebrate each milestone along the way.

- You give up before you see results. This is a big one, it's actually one of the biggest reasons. *Impatience is the enemy of change. In today's digital world, most people struggle to wait for the time it takes to reach a goal.*

Just because you can't see results, doesn't mean our efforts are wasted. You need to stick to your goals longer than you think before you experience lasting change.

Whether you slipped up, got overwhelmed, or simply lost steam on the way to habit change, here are some ways to maintain perspective and move forward:

1. Remember why you started.

If you feel like your momentum is fading, think back to your purpose. Why did you want to make a change in the first place? Connect to the **core values** underlying your goal. Maybe you're trying to lose weight, it could be because you want to run and play with your kids. Perhaps you want to pursue a new career path so that you have more freedom in life. Reminding yourself of the reasons driving your goal will help you reignite motivation.

2. Jump back in, wherever you are.

Developing good habits takes persistence and perseverance. Inertia will halt your progress if you let it, so get right back into your routine as soon as possible. Give someone permission to hold you accountable to the schedule you set up for yourself, whether that's getting to the gym once a week or writing for 15 minutes a day.

3. Make a plan for the future.

The better you plan for potential pitfalls, the easier you overcome them. Think about possible challenges that might arise which could derail you from your goal. Then create a plan to deal with those triggers. For example, if you know you'll be tempted to indulge when going out to dinner, look at the menu earlier in the day. Choose what you'll order in advance when you're in a positive frame of mind (and not ravenously hungry).

4. Just say 'no' to time sucks.

The average person has more than a dozen personal projects going on at once. Hello, overwhelmed! Can you relate? Too many distractions eat away at your ability to focus. Eliminate obvious timewasters like TV and social media. Define specific times when

Setbacks

you'll check email, for example, to create boundaries. You want to avoid wasting precious attention on trivial, unimportant matters. Be mindful to also limit time with energy-draining, negative people.

5. Recommit in writing.

The physical act of putting pen to paper has a powerful effect on your ability to follow-through. People who write down their goals are 42% more likely to achieve their dreams than those who don't. Visual reminders can also be motivating. I have a note on my computer with a smiley face that inspires me to stay positive even on the worst days.

6. Focus on progress, not perfection.

If you're getting sidetracked, it could be because your goal is too big or too vague. When you lack clarity, it's easy to make missteps. Design weekly or monthly mini-milestones to shoot for. Break down what might be a gigantic life change into a series of steps. Each day pick one essential task to accomplish that helps move you forward. Slow, consistent progress is much better than taking on too much and giving up quickly.

Similarly, think about the positive progress you've made instead of dwelling on how much you got sidetracked. Look back on how many days you've stuck to a new fitness routine. Don't dwell on how many times you've skipped your workout. Celebrate how far you've come: What lessons have you learned? What are you most proud of? Balancing reflection with a forward-looking exercise like writing a letter to your future self is a perfect way to continue your growth.

If you do get distracted, don't worry. See it as an opportunity to strengthen your resilience. You're getting better at rolling with the unpredictability of life each and every day. And that is the most valuable confidence builder of all.

Remember that you are not the only one that has setbacks, WE ALL DO. It's about set goals, celebrating the small accomplishments. Step by step you will achieve them.



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EMPATHY



Leadership Always Matters

The poet Archibald MacLeish once said, “There’s only one thing more painful than learning from experience, and that’s not learning from experience.” How many times have we seen people who have made mistakes in the past, turn around and make the same ones again?

Each year, the Lake Norman Chamber hosts a Leadership Retreats for both the adult and junior sessions of **Leadership Lake Norman**. Created in 1997, the Chamber saw the need to create and nurture future community, elected, and business leaders of our region. The program was developed to expose these individuals to the resource agencies, history, and community infrastructure of our communities, county, and state. The program has seen graduates emerge as town elected officials, two North Carolina State House representatives, Civic Club presidents (Rotary and Kiwanis), and Chamber Board Members. Several of our key town staff including two town managers, assistant managers, police chiefs, parks and recreation, and planning staff are Leadership graduates. Not to mention the many business leaders in both corporate and small business.

Ten years ago, a program was created for high school juniors which this year saw 20 participants from five area high schools.

If **Leadership Lake Norman** focuses on one thing, it is to learn from your experiences. Those experiences begin with the team building exercises, continue with the sessions, and culminate in graduation. Those who make it a practice to reflect on personal experience, evaluate those experiences, and learn from them, distinguishes those who lead and those who will follow. It reminds me of the parable of the fox, the wolf, and the bear. One day they all went hunting together, and after each caught a deer, they discussed how they would divide their spoils.

The bear asked the wolf how he thought it should be done. The wolf said everyone should get one deer. Suddenly the bear ate the wolf. Then the bear turned to the fox and asked him how he proposed to divide the rewards. The wise fox offered the bear his deer and said the bear should also take both his own and the wolf’s deer as well.

“Where did you get such wisdom?” asked the bear. “From the wolf,” replied the fox. As the president of our chamber of commerce, I have really enjoyed watching trainers like Chip Scholz and Titus Bartolotta work with our adult and junior participants in the team building exercises and communication dynamics programs held at each retreat. This past year, the theme for Titus’s session with the students was entitled, **“Leadership Always Matters!”**

Listening to Titus and Chip there are a few take-aways that I have: First, an effective leadership class has members who complement each other and leaders always emerge in every group. At every leadership retreat a leader will appear, sometimes

Leadership Always Matters

several, with a couple of common characteristics: they know exactly where they are going, and they persuade others to follow.

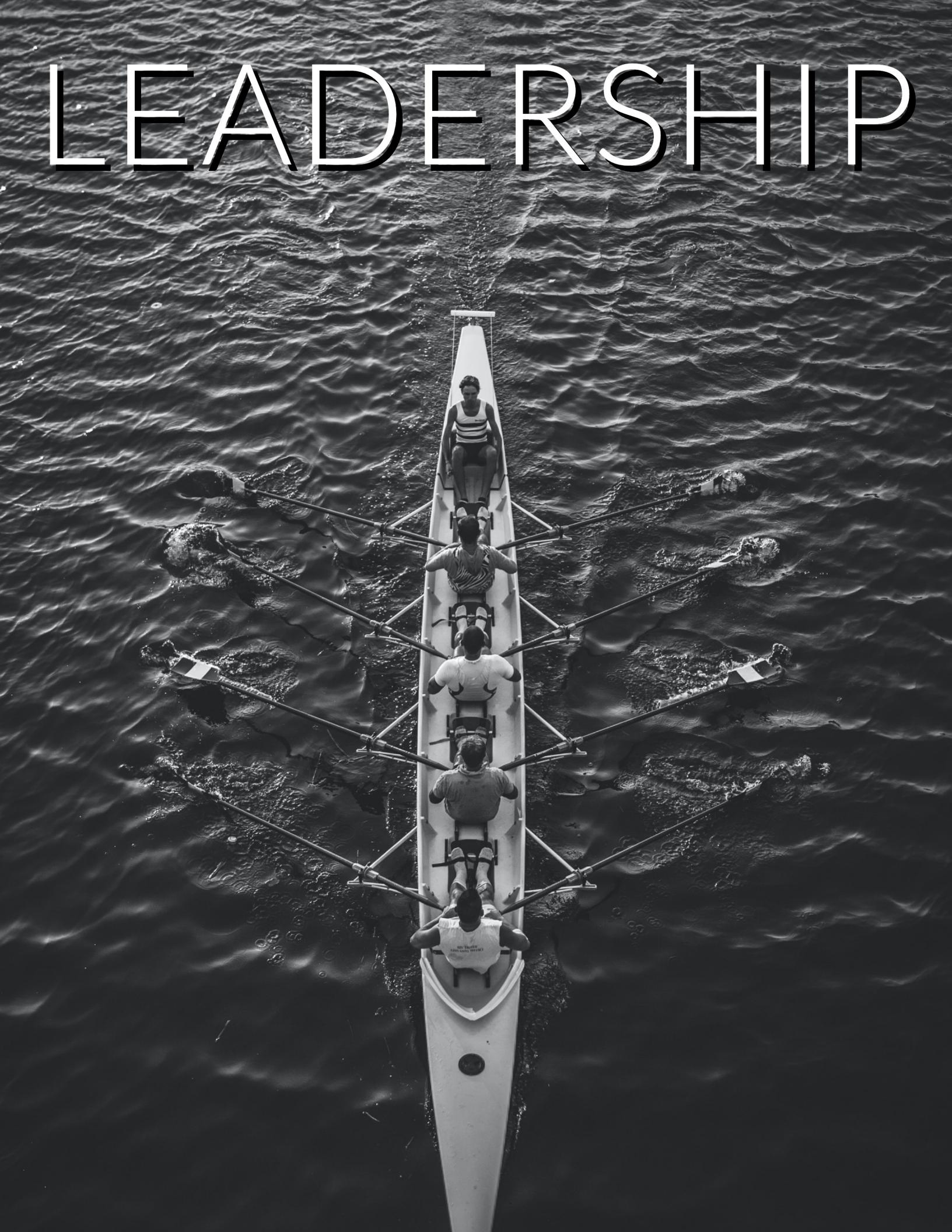
A great leader earns your trust and inspires confidence in their followers. It has been said, a good leader inspires their followers to have confidence in them. But an outstanding leader inspires their followers to have confidence in themselves.

Ronald Reagan once said, “The greatest leader is not necessarily the one who does the greatest things. He or she is the one that gets people to do the greatest things.” And that is simply great advice from the Gripper.



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LEADERSHIP



MINDSET



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The background of the entire image is a dark, solid black. Overlaid on this black background is a complex, abstract shape resembling a flame or a piece of flowing fabric. The color of this shape is a deep, saturated blue, with some darker purple and black areas where it appears to fold or twist. It has several distinct lobes and curves, creating a sense of movement and depth.

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