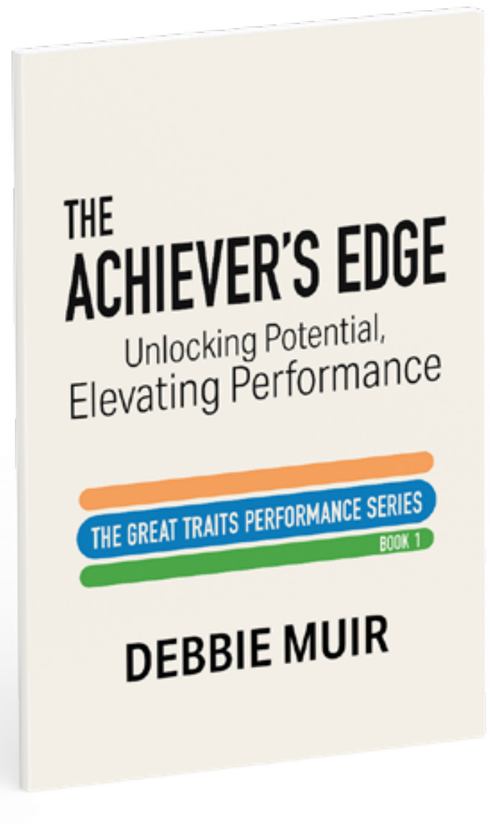
THE LEADER'S EDGE

A Collaborative Approach to Achieving Excellence

THE GREAT TRAITS PERFORMANCE SERIES

BOOK 2

DEBBIE MUIR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Unlocking Potential,
Elevating Performance
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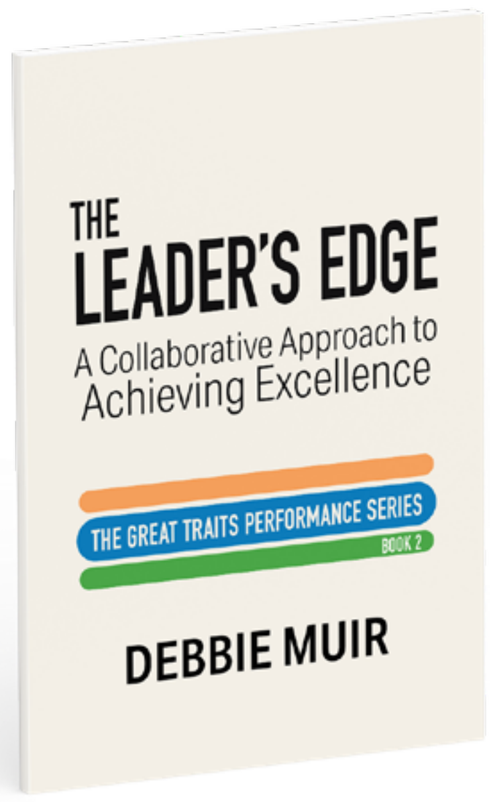
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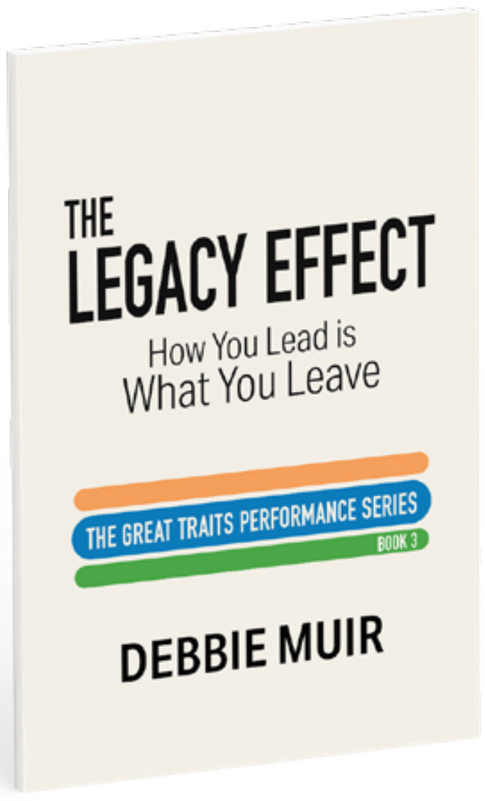
THE
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How You Lead is
What You Leave
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BOOK 3
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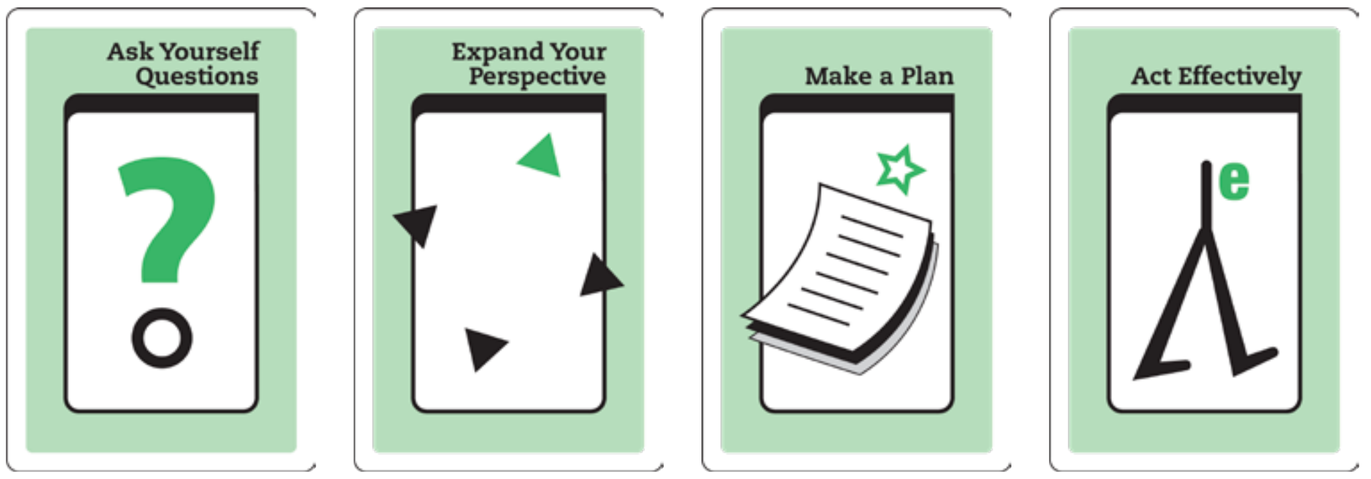
Ask Yourself Questions
Expand Your Perspective
Make a Plan
Act Effectively
Go the Distance
Be Innovative
Utilize Power of Thought
Generate Enthusiasm
Be Aware
Communicate Effectively
Have Purpose
Create Synergy
Exemplify Excellence
Embrace Contradictions
Show Conviction
Continually Evolve
Embody Values
Challenge Convention
Influence Wisely
Have Humility
Show Goodwill
Celebrate Humanity
Live Now
Make Possible

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USE THIS BOOK TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

The Leader's Edge is built around eight core leadership traits and is a framework for practicing the fundamentals of excellent leadership. These traits aren't just concepts; they're actionable, skill-based, and designed to help you improve through consistent reflection and practice.

Each trait includes a set of practical exercises that help you develop and apply the trait in your own leadership context. Whether you're new to leadership or looking to sharpen your edge, this resource is designed to meet you where you are.

Choose your starting point:

1. **Starting from the ground up?**

   If you're early in your leadership journey, work through the book trait by trait in order. Focus on understanding each one, then choose Skill Builders that resonate with your current context, role, or goals. Each one is designed to help you build skill through real application and thoughtful practice.

2. **Facing a challenge?**

   This is a framework, not a formula. Use it as a reference tool. Scan the traits and ask yourself: Where is the breakdown? It might be a vision that isn't clear, communication that isn't landing, or a lack of alignment. Once you spot the gap, dive into that trait and its Skill Builders to work the issue in a focused way.

3. **Already a seasoned leader?**

   Think of this as a return to fundamentals. Just like top athletes revisit the basics at the start of every season, great leaders sharpen their core skills regularly. Skim, reflect, and use this book to check in with yourself. See where you might have drifted, gotten complacent, or let certain traits slide. Great leadership demands that you keep sharpening your edge — that's what allows you to grow and perform at ever higher levels.

4. **Want to build a weekly practice?**

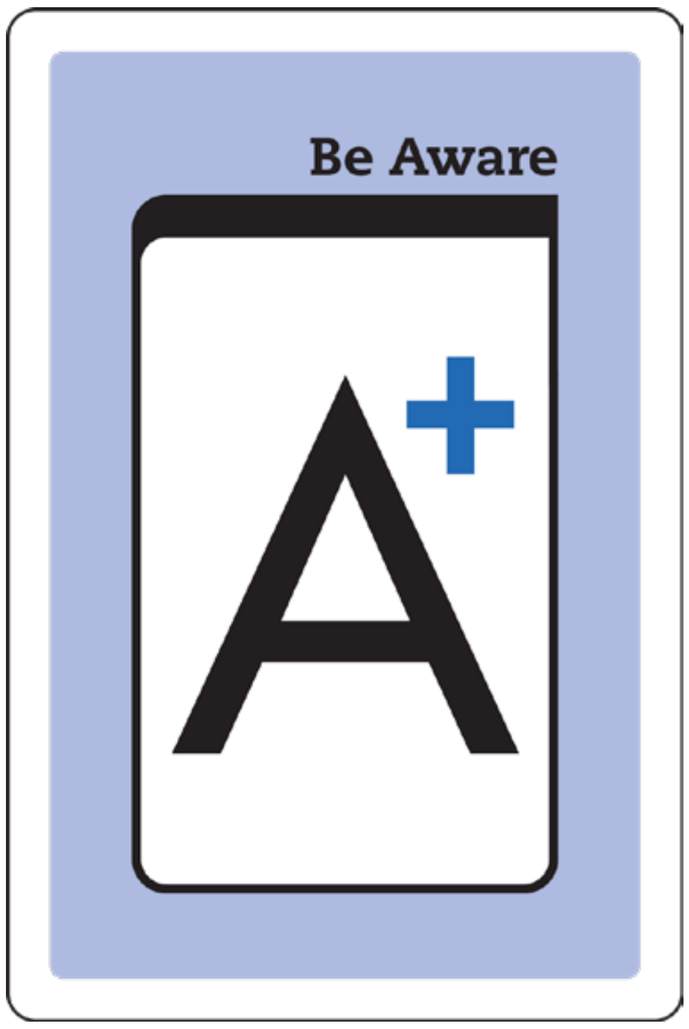
   Here's a simple approach: each week choose one trait to focus on. Keep it top of mind and look for chance to apply it in your day-to-day work and interactions. You'll be surprised what happens when you put one trait under the spotlight — patterns start to shift, moments feel more intentional, and your leadership sharpens almost without you realizing it.

Make it your own. Enjoy the process, have fun with it, and don't be afraid to come up with your own ways to use the book.

BE AWARE

KEY CONCEPT

The greater your awareness, the greater your capacity to act effectively as a leader.



ESSENTIAL SKILLS

- Develop the ability to notice and understand your thoughts and behaviours.
- Observe others' behaviour and help them become aware of their own thought processes.
- Observe and understand the dynamics within your organization and industry to effectively influence the environment around you.

As you begin the leader traits, remember that being aware always starts with you. The first step is to check-in with yourself to ensure your own thinking and resulting actions align with where you want them to be.

That said, true self-awareness is one of the hardest things to achieve. We often assume we're self-aware, but many times we're not as in tune with our thoughts, behaviours, or their impact as we believe.

Why should you increase your self-awareness?

Cultivating self-awareness requires intentionality and honest reflection. Research by Korn Ferry analysts David Zes and Dan Landis confirms that there is a direct relationship between leader self-awareness and organizational financial performance.

In their white paper, A Better Return on Self-Awareness, they write that, “companies with a higher rate of return (ROR) also employ professionals who exhibit higher levels of self-awareness."

Only 20% of executives are aware of their thoughts, skills and talents. Learning to build self-awareness is an evolving process that takes time and practice.

The Korn/Ferry Institute: Zes and Landis,
A Better Return on Self-Awareness.

Understanding the Thought Cycle

We first introduced the Thought Cycle in The Achiever’s Edge as a way to help you recognize how your internal dialogue shapes your beliefs and drives your behaviour. As a leader, this concept becomes even more important. Your thoughts don’t just influence your own performance — they ripple outward, affecting how you lead, how you respond under pressure, and how others experience your leader-ship. The Thought Cycle helps you see the connection between your thinking, your beliefs, your actions, and your results, so you can lead with greater self-awareness and intentionality.

IN PRACTICE

From Gold to Gone Wrong

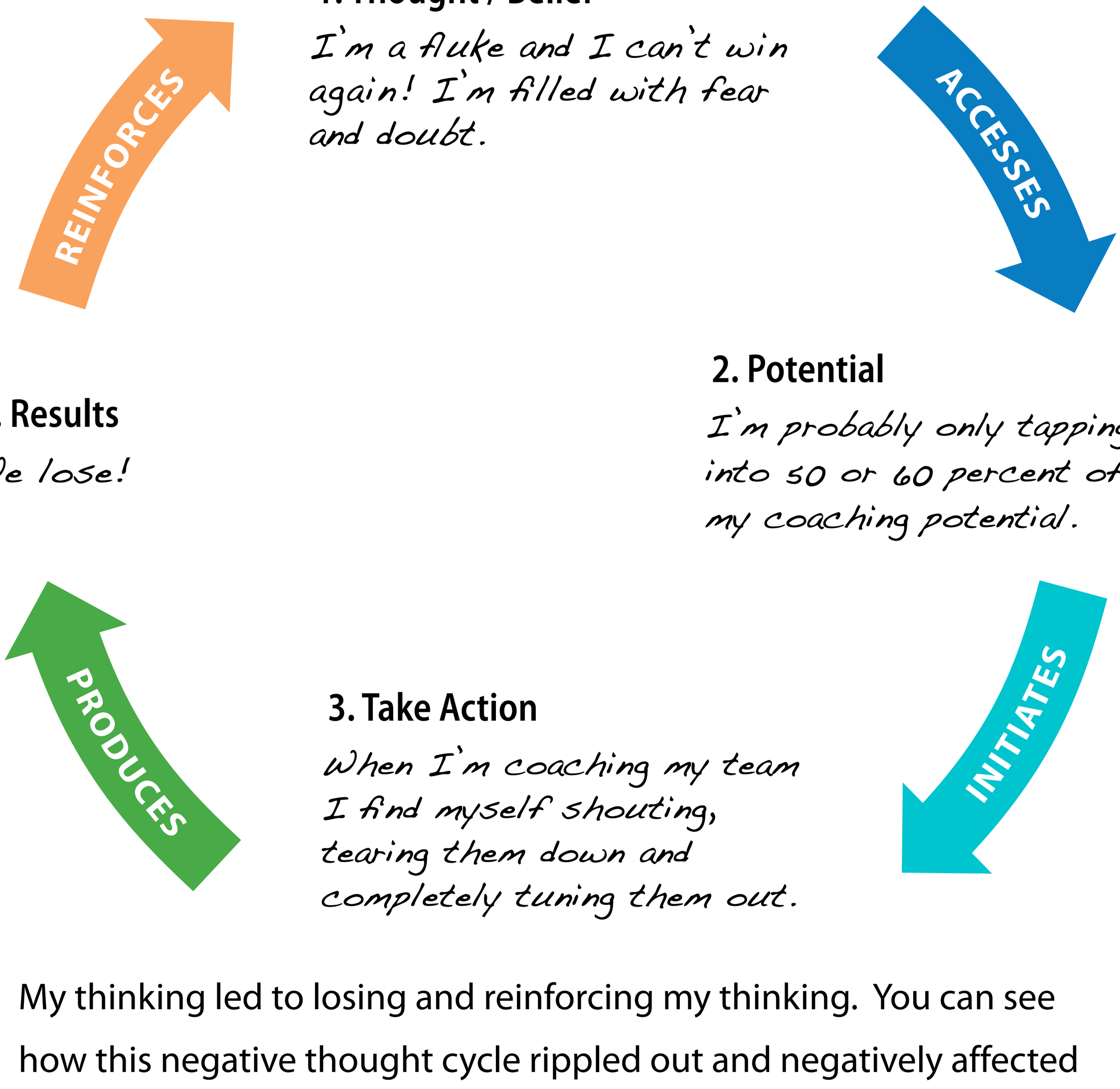
This is the story of how I turned a winning team into a losing one, without even realizing it.

When I first took over the club's top team, we had a dream season. At Nationals, we didn't just win, we dominated. We won every event! With trials for the World Aquatic Championships coming up the next year, everyone was saying how great we were going to be.

But when the season started up, things went downhill fast. I was constantly frustrated. I yelled at practices, kept making changes to the choreography, added more training — nothing felt good enough. When we got to the trials, guess what happened? We lost! I actually call this my *I Coached Them to Lose* story.

It wasn't until after the fact that I realized I had spent the entire year coaching from a place of fear. In the back of my mind I kept thinking, *"Maybe I was a fluke. What if I can't do it again?"* That thought cycle drove everything — how I showed up, and ultimately, how the team performed.

Here's how that thought cycle worked:



My thinking led to losing and reinforcing my thinking. You can see how this negative thought cycle rippled out and negatively affected the athletes I was coaching.

The WAIT Tool

In *The Achiever's Edge*, we introduced the WAIT tool - a simple yet powerful prompt to pause and ask yourself: "WAIT — What Am I Thinking?" It was designed to help you become more self-aware, to catch limiting thoughts in the moment and consider how your thinking was shaping your choices, actions, and ultimately, your performance.

Now, that same tool comes back into play but with a leadership lens. This time, it's not just about how your thinking impacts you: it's about how your thoughts, beliefs, and behaviours might be influencing the people you lead. Leadership starts with self-awareness but it doesn't end there. The WAIT tool now becomes a moment to pause and ask: "How is my thinking affecting those around me?" It's a shift from being inwardly focused on your own goals and growth, to recognizing that your thoughts and actions might be influencing the experience and performance of those you lead, for better or worse.

Skill Builder #1: WAIT – What Am I Thinking?

In a specific leadership situation, pause and ask: **WAIT — What Am I Thinking?** Then consider the impact of your thoughts and actions.

Are they helping or hindering the people I'm working with?

1. Reflection Questions:

    - What thoughts, doubts, fears, or issues might I have that could indirectly affect the performance of those I lead? Check out my example in the Thought Cycle on page 15.
    - What thoughts or beliefs do I have that help me get the best out of those I lead?

2. Ask Yourself:

    - Is there a behaviour I want to shift? Reinforce?
    - What small change can I make in how I lead today to create a more positive impact?

Leadership is About Enabling the Full Potential of Others

Leaders have significant influence on the people they guide by helping them develop self-awareness. In many ways, this reflects what's often called emotional intelligence (EQ). This skill focuses on building your ability to observe and understand others' thinking processes.

Just as you've worked to identify whether your own thoughts are empowering or limiting, you can guide others to do the same. By helping them recognize how their thinking patterns influence their actions and outcomes, you empower them to shift their thinking and improve their results.

IN PRACTICE

Why Can't You?

I started working with Mark Tewksbury, a Canadian swimmer specializing in the 100-metre backstroke, as he prepared for the Barcelona Olympics. He asked me to help him with his starts, turns, and underwater kick which were areas where my experience in synchronized swimming could make a difference. As we trained, I noticed something that had nothing to do with technique — his mindset! Compared to my athletes, who were World Champions, his language and attitude lacked confidence and possibility.

One day, I decided to challenge his thinking. I asked, “Why can’t you beat Jeff Rouse?”, the current world record holder in his event, expecting him to realize there was nothing standing in his way. Instead, within seconds, he listed a long string of barriers preventing him from winning. That moment was a wake-up call. I knew then I had to help him see how his thinking was holding him back. We did an exercise — writing down all his limiting thoughts, crossing out what he couldn’t control, and making a plan for the rest. As he focused on what he could change, he unlocked his full potential and started training and performing like a champion. Ultimately, he beat Jeff Rouse and won Olympic gold.

Here's what Mark's thought cycle looked like:

1. Mark Thought / Believed

I can't beat Jeff Rouse.
I'm weak off the start.
I'm weak off the turn.
Jeff is 6'4". I'm Canadian.

REINFORCES

ACCESSES

4. Results

Mark would lose to Jeff Rouse – reinforcing his belief that he couldn't beat him.

2. Potential

I saw how Mark isn't accessing his full potential.

PRODUCES

INITIATES

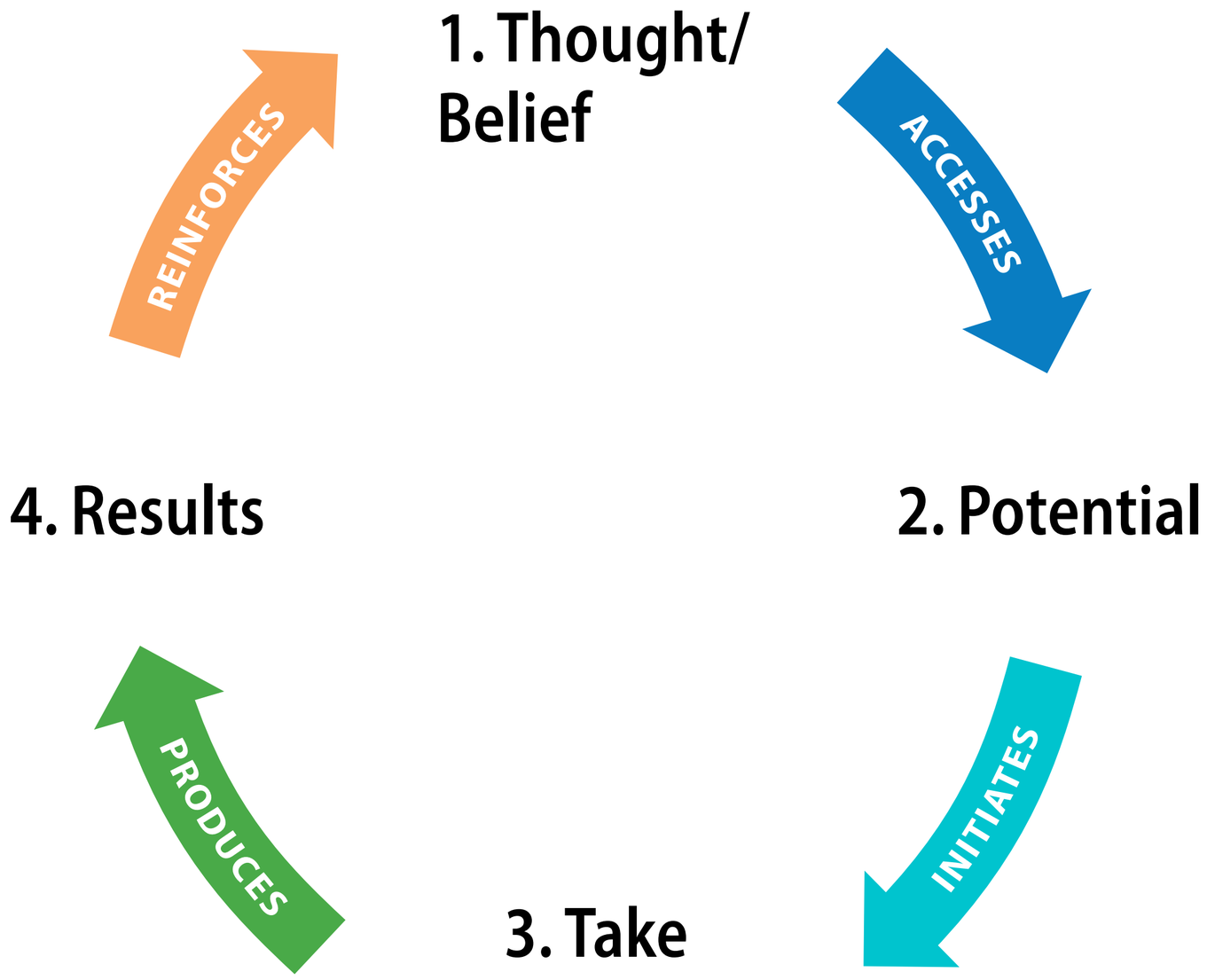
3. Actions Taken

Mark wasn't getting the best of himself in training because his thinking was holding him back.

Skill Builder #2: Thought Cycle Insight

Helping Others Understand

Use this exercise to introduce the Thought Cycle to someone you're leading. Share the concept with them, walk through an example if helpful, and then invite them to reflect on their own patterns of thinking and behaviour.



The goal is to spark a conversation where they can start to recognize how their thoughts may be influencing their actions, and how they can shift both to achieve better results.

1. Thought / Belief

ACCESSES

2. Potential

INITIATES

3. Take Action

PRODUCES

4. Results

REINFORCES

FOREWORD

It's a true privilege to write this foreword for The Leader's Edge: A Collaborative Approach to Achieving Excellence — a leadership book that stands apart as a practical, hands-on guide for the real world of work. At a time when organizations are grappling with complexity, rapid change, and evolving employee expectations, this book offers a grounded, human-centered road map for leadership growth. Leadership is so often defined, yet rarely understood. Debbie captures the "essence" of what leadership is and how great leaders unleash the potential of their team(s).

What sets this book apart is its clear commitment to action. Rather than prescribing what a "good leader" should be, it empowers readers to discover their own leadership identity, one trait, one skill, and one action at a time. Through the eight essential traits — each supported by core, practical skills — it provides a structure that is as reflective as it is results-driven. Whether you're new to leadership or refining your craft after years of experience, the tools in this book will meet you where you are and challenge your growth.

What makes The Leader's Edge a standout contribution to the Great Traits Performance Series is its focus on leadership as a discipline grounded in lifelong learning and self-awareness. This book doesn't just inform — it equips. With its Skill Builders, reflective exercises, and downloadable workbook, it becomes a lasting resource leaders can revisit as they grow and face new challenges.

As a subscriber to the Great Traits program, I have seen first hand the change in those who participate in Debbie's coaching. This book takes that training to a whole new level and shapes the future of business leaders, shaping our economy and well being.

The exercises offer a valuable pause for self-assessment, encouraging readers to explore their personal leadership style and mindset. The 17 Skill Builders provide a clear, practical overview of essential leadership capabilities — each one reinforcing why these traits matter and how they shape results. Whether you lead a team or work independently, these skills will help you adapt, grow, and succeed at every level.

And perhaps most importantly, this book reminds us that leadership is not a destination — it's a daily practice. Learning, applying, and refining these skills in both your personal and professional life is what will keep you sharp, grounded, and consistently at the top of your game. That's the real power of The Leader's Edge — it's not about theory, it's about transformation.

We are in an era that demands more from leaders — not just technical expertise, but empathy, adaptability, and the ability to bring people together with purpose.

The Leader's Edge speaks directly to this moment. It reinforces the idea that collaboration, clarity, and character are not soft skills — they are the foundation of excellence.

I am inspired by the practicality and intention behind this book. It doesn't overcomplicate leadership. Instead, it distills it into something deeply approachable, repeatable, and powerful. It reminds us that leadership is not about having all the answers — it's about taking ownership, building trust, and leading forward with courage and connection.

Congratulations to Debbie for continuing to raise the bar in leadership education. And thank you once again for the opportunity to be a small part of this meaningful work.

Well done.

Randy

Randy Upright is the CEO of Manpower in Alberta, now in his third decade leading this organization. Manpower not only places talent, but is a leading talent developer. Currently Randy is chairing SAIT's Real Futures campaign, transforming who, how and what is taught at SAIT.

In addition, Randy is the sitting President of ACSESS, the Association of Canadian Search Employment and Staffing Services. Shaping future leaders is one of Randy's greatest passions.

ABOUT GREAT TRAITS

Founded in 2008 by Olympians Mark Tewksbury and Debbie Muir, Great Traits is a high-performance company built on a simple idea: the skills behind world-class performance can be learned, practiced, and applied by anyone. Mark, an Olympic gold medalist, and Debbie, a multiple Olympic medal-winning coach, first joined forces during Mark's path to victory at the Barcelona Games. That collaboration revealed something powerful — the same strategies that drive elite athletes to greatness can unlock extraordinary performance in any field.

Their best-selling book, The Great Traits of Champions, laid the foundation for everything that followed. Drawing on decades of experience at the highest levels of sport, Debbie and Mark translated the mindset, discipline, and focus of elite performance into practical tools, engaging programs, and accessible resources for everyday achievers. At the core is a belief that performance isn't left to chance — it's a skill set you can train systematically, just like athletes do.

Today, Great Traits works with individuals and organizations across all areas of life, helping them build the performance skills necessary to excel. Whether in business, sports, personal development, or leadership, Great Traits focuses on developing and strengthening the skills that turn into lasting habits — skills that enable people to perform with consistency, clarity, and confidence.

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