

LEADING THINGS YOU DIDN'T START

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*WINNING BIG WHEN YOU INHERIT
PEOPLE, PLACES, AND POSSIBILITIES*

TYLER REAGIN

FOREWORD BY JUDAH SMITH

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Tyler Reagin



WATERBROOK

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*To Ganny and Poppy Jenkins.
Thanks for all the lunches and gas money that helped get
me through college and start my career. I miss you both.*

*And here's to my 420 SAT score in English.
I'm thankful I didn't let that score keep me from writing
and creating leadership content. Don't let things you
don't like define you either.*

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Foreword

IT'S ONE THING TO START AND LEAD SOMETHING, BUT IT'S ANOTHER thing entirely to lead something you didn't start.

More than a decade ago, my wife and I took over as lead pastors of Churchome, a growing church community formerly known as the City Church. We had always known that someday we would lead the church, but someday seemed a long way off. Then, due to my father's declining health and his battle against cancer, the transition was dramatically accelerated. Within a very short time, we found ourselves at the helm of a church we loved—but one that seemed far too big for our experience or capacity.

Not only was the task itself enormous, but we were also trying to fill the shoes and follow in the footsteps of legends. My parents planted the church and functioned as its lead pastors for many years, and they were incredible leaders. They built a community that looked to them and loved them. Their impact was—and still is—felt around the world.

I remember the conflicting feelings of stepping into that role: it was exhilarating and terrifying, inspiring and intimidating, a privilege and a weight. It wasn't easy (that's an understatement), but I wouldn't change it for anything. Those years of transition were like no other season in our lives. It was a time of growth, of mistakes, of prayer, of learning, of vision, of change. As difficult as it was, the beauty has far outlasted the challenges: today the church continues to grow, thrive, and fulfill its mission.

Looking back, I realize there were many things I didn't know going into that transition—things I had to learn the hard way. I had to hit the ground running, and I tripped and fell more than I probably should

have. It took me a while to get up to speed in my leadership role.

Tyler's book *Leading Things You Didn't Start* was written for precisely that reason: to help new leaders hit the ground running. From his years of experience in a wide range of leadership roles, he presents solid, practical keys to making healthy transitions while keeping the bumps and bruises to a minimum.

It's a timely message, and it could make all the difference if your organization is in the process of handing off the leadership baton—especially if *you* are the one receiving that baton. One of the marks of a healthy organization is that it has the momentum, maturity, and margin to transcend any one leader. Whether you lead a church, a business, a nonprofit, or any other organization, if you and your team can navigate the transition to new leadership, you are on your way to multigenerational success.

—JUDAH SMITH

Section I

THE FOUNDATIONS FOR INHERITANCE

WHAT DEFINES GREAT LEADERS?

Leaders are learners.
Leaders ask great questions.
Leaders get the best out of their people.
Leaders go first.
Leaders serve those around them.
Leaders solve problems.
Leaders develop systems.
Leaders encourage.
Leaders fight for the best.
Leaders build great organizations.

When you lead at a high level for any length of time, you'll get noticed. Even if you're not a perfectly polished leadership gem . . . *yet*. Not only will you get noticed, but you'll also get opportunity—opportunity to step into a new space. A new role. A promotion.

However, most of us won't initiate something new. Most of us, when called on, will step into a leadership role that belonged to someone else. We will join a team that already exists. We will take ownership of something we've inherited.

Taking over requires different leadership skills than starting something from scratch. A different challenge requires a different leadership approach.

I

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INHERITING INFLUENCE

I REMEMBER IT LIKE IT WAS YESTERDAY. THE KEYS WERE HANDED to me. Not to a car but to a movement. An incredibly important and beloved movement: Catalyst.

I was driving to the office for the first time. It was weird. I had been in my role with North Point Ministries for the past decade. My identity had been connected to that organization for years. Not only was I about to start something completely new, but my identity was also about to change. Again.

I had been with Catalyst for a year, but now I was taking the reins. The way leaders related to me was going to change. My new role involved a different set of responsibilities and greater authority. That realization elicited a fresh set of fears and insecurities but also excitement.

I remember being nervous and wondering whether I had what it was going to take to lead the organization into the future. I was curious whether I would be able to gain influence with and trust from the team that already existed and that had been investing in the organization for years.

Then I walked into the room, and I was in charge.

I had personally experienced meaningful God encounters through the movement. I had heard hundreds of leaders (I'm not exaggerating) talk about how it had changed their lives. Their families. Their churches. Their businesses.

God had handed me this movement to lead. I held the keys to Catalyst.

Catalyst had been around for fourteen years. It was a massive movement of Christian leaders that had had an impact on hundreds of thou-

sands of leaders. It was a platform that helped catapult many artists and speakers to new heights. It had influence in the church and outside the church. With that influence came attention. Everyone had an opinion on what Catalyst should be. Everyone would have thoughts on how I should lead it.

John Maxwell. Andy Stanley. Craig Groeschel. Christine Caine. So many legends had been part of this.

My heart and mind were filled with a complete range of emotions. My spirit was overwhelmed. My joy was real; my fear might've been even more real. How in the world was I to take this *precious* (said almost like Gollum in *The Lord of the Rings*) gift and steward it to the best of my ability? What was going to be my role in its story? How was I to make changes appropriately?

I was inheriting a very special gift. I was following directors like Gabe Lyons, Jeff Shinabarger, and Brad Lomenick. These guys had led incredibly well for their seasons. How was I to follow that? Was I to try to do what they did or do something else? Was my leadership going to be up to the task?

Catalyst really matters! It wasn't like the time when I was handed the G. I. Joe aircraft carrier as a kid. Then I felt responsibility for taking care of a special toy, but how well I did so was not going to affect anyone's life. This movement had had *eternal* impact because the leaders were faith leaders. Was I ready for this?

If you're reading this book, I have a hunch that you have taken over for someone, you've been handed something, or you have a multitude of somethings and someones you're trying to lead in a God-honoring way.

You may be asking some questions, such as these that were running through my mind and heart when I inherited Catalyst:

What in the world is God up to?

Do I have what it takes?

Do I really want to take over something so loved by so many?

Is there a secret sauce to doing what the leaders before me did?

What if it doesn't grow?

Why am I scared?
Why am I excited?
Do I have to make sure I always dress cool?
How in the world do I get the current team on board with my leadership?
Is everyone on the current team in the right seat on the bus?
Are they all supposed to be on this bus?
What do I do if I don't like how some things are done?
How do I honor the past without being crippled by the past?
What if they don't think I'm as funny as I think I am?
How do I lead with confidence and authenticity?
What are others going to think about me and the decisions I make?
What happens if I mess this up?
What happens if I succeed?
How do I steward the legacy of the leaders who started this movement?
God, are You sure it's me?

These questions were just the tip of the iceberg.

What's your experience? Have you ever been handed the keys and asked to lead something you were inheriting? Is that happening to you now? Maybe it's as simple as a job someone else did. Maybe it's a team of only two who reported to a prior leader. Maybe you are receiving someone else's vision. Or a church your parents started. Or an unfulfilled dream of the one handing it to you.

All I knew at Catalyst, with those keys in my hand, was that leading something you *start* is drastically different from leading something you *inherit*. It just is.

I'll be more specific. What are some of the differences between leading things you started yourself and leading things you didn't start? I admit this list isn't exhaustive, but here are some thoughts.

NEW

You decide how it looks.
 You create the expectations.
 You choose the people.
 No one has decided whether
 you're doing a good job.
 Fear is more from the unknown.
 You create the culture and DNA.
 You're neither profitable nor
 upside down yet.
 You decide your location.
 Expectations are forming and
 can't be compared with past
 ones.
 You are new and can't be com-
 pared with the "old leaders."

INHERITED

Someone else decided how it
 looks.
 You receive spoken and unspoken
 expectations.
 Someone else recruited the team.
 Some people love what you do
 and some don't.
 Fear is more from the known.
 Someone else created the culture
 and DNA.
 You're already profitable or
 you're upside down.
 The location is already decided.
 Expectations are clear and have
 historical backing.
 You are compared with others
 and critiqued.

This list could be expanded to fill an entire book. I suggest that you add or subtract items and make it your own. This might be the best exercise you could do as you begin to navigate a complex yet incredible journey.

Maybe you're taking over for someone who leads at the highest level.
 Or maybe you've inherited a failure that forced the past leader out. Ei-
 ther way, you've got some serious leading ahead. Issues like . . .

Where do you start?
Whom can you trust to talk to?
How long before making changes?

These and many other questions are why this book was written. In
 my twenty years working in movements started by other leaders, I've
 studied and focused on how to be life giving while leading something I
 didn't start. Actually, I believe the majority of leaders will never start

something on their own but will inherit something from someone else. Things like . . .

A job description

A stereotype

A space

A church

Relationships

Finances

Influence

Whoa, that last one by itself is a mind bender. How in the world do you manage someone else's influence that you are now entrusted with?

How to lead well in an inherited position might be one of the bigger issues organizations face. And it's a two-faceted challenge: What do you do when you take over something? And how do you as a leader set up your team and organization for future transitions?

So many churches today don't have succession plans. The founders have never thought through what's next. Have you ever worked for an organization where the leader didn't think anyone could do the job as well as she could? For one thing, that's not the most life-giving place to work. And it's going to be difficult for that organization to ever transition to a new leader.

As leaders, let's be wise. Let's do this right! Let's trust the timeless principles in Scripture to guide our day-to-day living and to help us navigate this potentially difficult opportunity.

One last caveat. I'm a Christian. I'm a pastor. I love to talk about how faith and life collide, how leadership is a higher calling. There are eternal consequences for how we handle the influence that's been handed to us. That's why I won't skirt around the spiritual element in leadership. For twenty-five years, my Christian faith has been the foundation of my leadership.

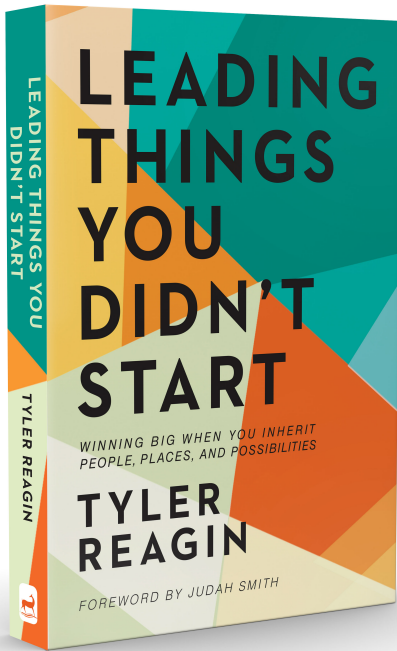
If you don't consider yourself a person of faith, I am still confident that this book will help you as you lead. I also think you might find here some ideas that can change the world. These concepts have stood the test of time and are called the fruit of the Spirit. They are love, joy,

peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.¹ These qualities will benefit any leader. But perhaps they are even more helpful for those who have inherited their leadership.

At the end of each chapter in sections 1–4, I’m going to ask you two questions to consider before moving on. Answer them honestly so that you have a good grasp of where you are in this process or where the group you’ve inherited is.

QUICK QUESTIONS

1. What’s one unique element of the situation you’re stepping into?
2. What do you think will be most important for you starting out?



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