

Leadership Beyond the Books: What It Takes to Build and Lead from Zero

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ABSTRACT

True leadership doesn't start with titles, money, or ready-made strategies—it begins with nothing but vision and grit. This talk explores how to build from zero, turning uncertainty into opportunity, failures into lessons, and small wins into unstoppable momentum. Beyond theory, it's about courage, authenticity, and the power to inspire belief where none exists.

INTRODUCTION

This is not a motivational speech, nor is it a success story. Today I want to speak about leadership beyond the books — leadership as it really is, when responsibility is real, decisions affect people, and no one is coming to save you. Everything I will share today comes from lived experience: starting, failing, learning, leading, and repeating that process again and again.

When I chose the title *Leadership Beyond the Books*, I did it intentionally. Not because books are bad. Not because learning is unnecessary. But because books usually show only one side of leadership. When we read business books, most of them are built around success stories. They tell us how someone succeeded, how they became number one, how everything worked out in the end. But we almost never read a book that tells a different story. “I tried. I failed. And I did not become successful, but I learned the lesson.” And that is strange, because in real life, failure happens much more often than success. Unsuccessful stories would also be very valuable lessons. But they are missing. Books usually show the results—not the full process. They show the end, not the cost. They show clarity — not confusion. This creates a picture of leadership that looks clean, logical, and predictable. Real life is not like that. Real leadership is uncomfortable. And uncomfortable stories rarely become books. That is why I want to speak beyond the books today.

Before Zero: Starting

Before talking about starting from zero, we need to talk about starting itself. Starting is one of the most important things in our lives. We all have many plans in our minds. And very often, the more we talk about our plans, the less we actually do. If doers were the majority, the world would look very different. But talkers are the majority. Sometimes, talking is what helps people survive the day. And that's okay. We can even call it a hobby. But leadership does not start with talking.

The real pain point is *starting*. In Armenia, there is a movie called “Live and War”. There is a scene where a grandfather is angry with his grandson and tells him:

“Your problems are your fears.

You are afraid of responsibility.

You are afraid of war.

You are even afraid to confess love.

Do something. Do something — even something foolish.

If you are afraid of death, go and fight.

But if you are afraid, don't just live in fear.

Do something. **Start something.**”

Starting is the most obvious thing —and at the same time, the most hidden key to success.

Remember, before we talk about building something from zero, we must talk about something even more important — *starting*.

-Most people have plans. Many people talk about plans. Very few people actually start.

But leadership does not begin with comfort. Leadership begins with action. Starting is obvious. And at the same time, it is the most hidden key to success.

Talkers, Wishes, and Illusions

We live in a world where talking, planning, and wishing often replace responsibility.

This year, as New Year wishes were coming in, I wanted to write a message to my team. I wrote a few sentences in our Teams chat — then deleted them. I wrote again — and deleted them again. There was a fight inside me between what people usually expect to hear and what is actually true.

Is it correct to wish people a healthy year if we all know that most health problems stem from our own lifestyle?
Is it correct to wish success if a person does not want to work on himself and improve? Will my wishes work?
Practically — no. And this brings us into a circle that we, as humans, love to stay in. Wishes become true only when we act. No one — not today, not tomorrow — will come and do the work for your better life.
Not because I didn't care — but because I questioned honesty. Is it honest to wish people health when we know most health problems are created by lifestyle? Is it honest to wish success when people do not want to work on themselves? Wishes do not create outcomes.
Only behavior does. No one — not today and not tomorrow — will come and do the work for you.

Drama vs Responsibility

People love drama. If I tell you how I started with no money, no support, and no guarantees, it will touch most of you. But I am not here for that. I am not here to collect emotional credit. Never wait for that, never wait to be appreciated. Most business books sell successful stories.
We never read books titled "I tried, I failed, and now I am homeless."
Not because it doesn't happen — but because it is uncomfortable.
Leadership is not storytelling. Leadership is a responsibility.

Risk Has a Price

Books often say that risk leads to success. That is only half the truth. Risk has a price. And responsibility changes how risk must be taken. Risk looks very different when people depend on your decisions, when you have a family, and when failure has real consequences. No one applauds risk when children are on the street. This is not fear. This is maturity.

Motivation, Pressure, and the Comfort Zone

There is an uncomfortable truth about motivation that leaders eventually learn.
When you are hungry — for survival, for progress, for relevance — motivation comes naturally. Pressure sharpens focus. It forces action. But when comfort arrives, motivation rarely stays on its own. Comfort relaxes urgency. It reduces tension. And over time, it softens the edge that once drove performance.
This idea was clearly expressed by Mike Tyson when he spoke about why he did not want his son to become a professional boxer. For him, boxing was not built in comfort. It was built in scarcity — through sacrifice, pain, and constant pressure. He had already taken those blows so that his children would not have to.
And because of that experience, he understood something deeply: when external pressure disappears, motivation must be rebuilt internally — or it disappears altogether. This lesson extends far beyond sport.
In leadership, the same rule applies. Early success is often powered by necessity. Growth is driven by hunger. But long-term leadership depends on discipline — the ability to maintain standards even when conditions become easier. And this leads to a simple but difficult conclusion:
If you want to lead like a fighter, there is no permanent place for a comfort zone. Comfort can exist — but it cannot become home. Leadership requires staying mentally alert, emotionally disciplined, and professionally uncomfortable enough to keep improving, even when success makes it tempting to slow down.

Phase One

Leadership is mostly learning — but not the comfortable kind. I call it painful learning in Phase 1.
Most leaders do not come from business or management backgrounds.
They come from other professions and learn leadership after they start. You learn to believe in people — and be betrayed. You believe again — and you fail again. You make decisions — and take responsibility for the consequences. Slowly, you move from emotional leadership to classical leadership. Not colder — just more stable.

Noise, Gossip, and Resistance

As success grows, so does noise. Gossip becomes background music.
The bigger the success, the louder the background. A leader does not waste time trying to silence noise.
Leadership means operating with this reality in mind. The conclusion summarizes your paper and ties together any loose ends. You can use the conclusion to make any final points, such as recommendations, predictions, or judgments.

What Leadership Really Is

Leadership is not an image. Leadership is not a LinkedIn post or a motivational quote. A leader makes correct decisions, delivers successful projects, leads people in the right direction, creates opportunities for development, and solves problems before they grow. A leader is not a nanny. Most people think that the leader must create an atmosphere that is comfortable for everyone- It's not true. Leadership requires strength, clarity, and responsibility.

Phase Two: Confidence

Phase Two begins when you win your mind. Today, we have around 100 specialists and four branches, playing a meaningful role in a cost-effective, high-quality market. That gives me confidence — not arrogance — that I could build it again from scratch. But the truth is: it is harder than you remember. There are nights when your body sleeps, but your mind works 24 hours. Emails are written and rewritten for hours because words carry consequences. The hardest battle is not in the market. The worst war in the world is between what you feel and what you understand. With all respect, many people do not fully understand what it means to be number one in a department, a division, or a company. Every decision affects others. And at the end of the day, you are alone with those decisions. At a certain point in leadership, something fundamental changes. Confidence stops being emotional. It becomes structural. It is similar to the logic behind the game Who Wants to Be a Millionaire. In that game, once you reach a certain level, you no longer fall back to zero. Even if you make a wrong decision later, you keep a guaranteed amount. Leadership works the same way.

This is the moment when fear disappears — not because risk is gone, but because you have mastered yourself in what you do. You are no longer afraid of the job you are doing. You understand it. You can rebuild it — often faster, better, and more efficiently than the first time. That is not arrogance. That is earned confidence. This is the leadership feeling — the quiet understanding that all the work, all the pain, all the discipline were not wasted. They became competent. Elon Musk has expressed this idea in different ways over the years. His core message has always been the same: once you deeply understand how value is created, money itself is no longer the source of security. Knowledge, systems, and execution are.

For leaders, the lesson is simple and powerful: When confidence comes from mastery, not position, you are no longer afraid of losing — because you know you can create again. And that is the real definition of leadership confidence.

Conclusion: Time and “After”

My father is a painter. He accepted orders he did not love — he is not signing on to work, but to fund real art, buy good canvas and high-quality oil; he needs money to educate his kids and keep a family. That taught me a fundamental lesson: Sometimes you must give even if you don't like it to receive more later. In leadership, the first thing we sell is time. Want growth? You give time. Want expertise? You give time. Want leadership? You give time wisely. This is not about money. It is about learning, integrity, relationships, and responsibility. We talk a lot about what comes after. But only those who live it understand what “after” really means. Leadership is a responsibility repeated every day.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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