



THE SOUL OF THE LEADER

YOU CANNOT LEAD WHAT YOUR
SOUL CANNOT CARRY

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You Cannot Lead What You Cannot Carry

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PREFACE

You are carrying something no one can see. Not the workload — you expected that. Not the decisions, the pressure, or the criticism — you were trained for those. Something deeper. Something that follows you home, sits beside you at dinner, and greets you before your eyes open in the morning. If you have picked up this book, you already know what I mean. What follows is for you.

For many years, I believed leadership was primarily about competence, effort, and responsibility carried well. I believed that if I worked hard enough, learned fast enough, and endured pressure long enough, meaning would follow.

It didn't.

I have spent my professional life inside leadership systems that reward performance and resilience — global corporations, consulting firms, start-ups, and international humanitarian organisations. I led teams, managed risk, made decisions that affected people, money, and institutions. Outwardly, my career advanced. Inwardly, something essential was slowly eroding.

I did not recognise it at first. Most leaders don't. I was baptised in 2001 after a long spiritual search, but faith did not immediately reorder my inner life. Ambition still defined me. Achievement still anchored my identity. I obeyed God when it fit my plans — and resisted Him when it threatened them. Over time, responsibility increased faster than my inner life could carry it. Eventually, the strain showed.

I obeyed what I believed was a calling into humanitarian leadership — and stepped into crisis instead. I returned to the commercial world and pushed harder. I founded companies. I carried authority without rest. My marriage fractured. My faith thinned. My inner life collapsed long before my leadership did. Then everything came apart — quietly, thoroughly.

What remained was not clarity, but truth: I could no longer sustain leadership by effort, intelligence, or control. I had built a life that worked — and a soul that could not carry it.

What followed was not recovery in the way leadership culture defines it. It was formation. Slow. Humbling. Costly. Marked by repentance, silence, fasting, waiting, and learning to listen again. Over years — not months — my understanding of leadership changed at its root.

I began to see what I had missed, and what many leadership systems still avoid naming: Leadership does not fail first because of strategy, skill, or character flaws. It fails when the soul carrying authority has never been formed to bear its weight.

This book exists because I could not find language for that truth when I needed it most. What follows is not a memoir, though my story runs through it. It is not a theological treatise, though theology shapes every page. It is a framework for understanding what leadership demands of the inner life — and why so many leaders eventually discover that the weight they carry has quietly been deforming them.

It is not a book about leadership techniques. It does not promise optimisation, clarity, or faster results.

It is a book about the inner life required to carry responsibility without being deformed by it. About authority that is received rather than manufactured. About leadership that flows from obedience rather than self-justification.

This book is written for leaders who are capable, committed, and quietly strained. For those who have succeeded — and discovered that success alone cannot sustain them. For those in crisis, and for those who sense one forming beneath the surface. It is written for those willing to be re-formed — slowly, honestly, and at cost. It will not flatter you. It will not rush you. And it will not leave you untouched.

I am not writing as one who has arrived, but as one who has stopped pretending that arrival is the point.

And yet this book is written in hope. Because leadership does not have to hollow the soul. Authority does not have to be carried alone. And formation, though costly, leads to a freedom ambition never could.

If parts of this story echo your own questions, fractures, or longings, then this book is for you. Not to give you answers before you are ready — but to help you carry leadership truthfully, faithfully, and whole.

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PART I — THE SELF-MADE SOUL

1 THE WEIGHT THAT NEVER LIFTS

Frankfurt, Germany 2006

December 2006. My younger daughter Elizabeth was twenty-one months old when the scans confirmed what the doctors had suspected: a pilocytic astrocytoma — a tumour in the cerebellum. We did not yet know whether it was benign or malignant. We only knew it was there, and it had to come out.

She was operated on the fifth of December a day before my birthday. One day before Christmas Eve. The surgery was successful. But what followed was not recovery — it was a year of crisis that never fully ended. Complications with cerebrospinal fluid. Problems with pressure inside her skull. The Frankfurt university hospital had no paediatric neurosurgery — they had implanted shunt systems designed for adults into a twenty-one-month-old child. The scars tore through her scalp. We transferred to a specialist unit in Heidelberg. In total, seven operations in one year.

Anna lived in the hospital. For weeks, then months. Our older daughter Catherine stayed with friends — sometimes for days at a time, shuttled between families while her mother slept on a camp bed beside her sister's cot and her father drove between hospital and office. After the acute phase: four months of rehabilitation. Anna and Elizabeth in a rehab facility. Catherine and I at home, holding what remained of a normal life.

And during all of this, I was in partner nomination at the firm.

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The partner nomination process at a Big 4 firm is a kind of assessment centre. You are gathered with other candidates and put through exercises designed to reveal your leadership capacity. Psychologists observe you. Outdoor instructors take you into the forest. You walk blindfolded across a rope bridge with missing planks

while a colleague shouts instructions from below. The purpose is to discover your comfort zone, your limitations, your trust threshold. How do you respond when the ground disappears?

Afterwards, the facilitators ask reflective questions. Did you discover your limits? Did you feel what it is like to step beyond your comfort zone? What can you do to expand it?

I sat there with my mouth open.

If you knew, I thought. If you knew what I go back to when this exercise is over. If you knew that my daughter is in a hospital bed with a shunt drilled into her skull. If you knew that my wife has not slept in her own bed for months. If you knew that my older daughter has been living at other people's houses because there is no parent at home. If you knew that I drive from here to the clinic and sit beside a child who may never develop normally and then drive to a client site and pretend that a quarterly audit is the most important thing in the world.

The comfort zone exercises felt like a parody of my actual life. They were training us to handle artificial pressure while I was drowning in the real kind. But I did not say any of this. I completed the exercises. I answered the questions. I performed competence, composure, and trust — the same way I performed them every day.

And then I drove back to the hospital.

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That year was not one crisis. It was the compression of every kind of weight a leader can carry into a single season: a child's life in the balance, a marriage stretched to breaking, a family scattered across hospital wards and borrowed bedrooms, a career demanding peak performance at the exact moment when there was nothing left to give. And no one at the firm knew the full picture. No one in the hospital knew the professional pressure. I carried both worlds simultaneously, and neither world could see the other.

I was forty-two. I had plans. I wanted the partnership. And I was living day to day — no capacity to plan, no margin to think, just the

next thing that needed to be survived. I wanted to make partner more than I wanted to understand what the weight was doing to me.

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There is a weight that comes with leadership that no one warns you about. Not the workload — you expected that. Not the decisions — you were trained for those. Not even the criticism — you learned to absorb it.

This weight is different. It settles inside you. It follows you home. It sits beside you at dinner, lies next to you at night, and greets you before your eyes open in the morning. It is not on your calendar. It cannot be delegated. And no amount of productivity can make it lift.

Weight accumulates invisibly. No single moment deposits the full burden on your shoulders. It gathers slowly, imperceptibly — like sediment at the bottom of a river. A conversation you cannot stop replaying. A decision you are not sure was right. A child you cannot fix. A marriage you do not have time to repair. Each one, by itself, is manageable. But they accumulate. And the accumulation changes something. You become heavier. The weight is not in your body. It is in your chest, your decisions, your sleep. The heaviness becomes your baseline. You do not realise how much you are carrying until something breaks.

The Engine We Build

You cannot outrun weight. But most of us try. We build an engine — relentless activity, compulsive excellence, the careful performance of calm when we feel chaos. The engine runs on fuel. And the fuel is you.

Mine functioned while my daughter was in surgery. It functioned while my family fractured across institutions and borrowed beds. Stopping felt more dangerous than continuing — because the weight was still there, and if I stopped, I believed it would crush me.

Until it didn't.

The Cost No One Calculates

The depletion arrives quietly. Sleep that does not restore. A body that holds tension in places you did not know existed. Illness that arrives at every holiday, as if your immune system was waiting for permission to collapse. A narrowing of emotional range — you feel less, both pain and joy. Presence that is not really present: your family gets your body; your work gets your energy. Prayer that feels like talking to a wall. Scripture that lies flat on the page. Not doubt, exactly. Just absence.

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“Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

There is another way to carry weight. I did not know it then. I only knew the engine. And the engine never asked whether the load should be carried — it just kept running.

I found the other way only when the engine failed.

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Pause.

Before you continue, take a moment. Where do you feel the weight most — not the tasks, but the invisible burden? What engine have you built to compensate for it?

You do not need to answer these questions. Just notice them. And if something in you recognises itself in these pages — know this: recognition is the first step. Not toward more effort. Toward something else entirely.

End of the reading sample

The Soul of the Leader

You Cannot Lead What Your Soul Cannot Carry

The book continues through the self-made soul,
the threshold of faith and the long work of formation.

Paperback and Kindle on Amazon:

<https://amzn.eu/d/o8RZbzoZ>