The WORLD'S 50 GREATEST LEADERS

IN AN ERA THAT FEELS STARVED FOR LEADERSHIP, WE'VE FOUND MEN AND WOMEN WHO WILL INSPIRE YOU—SOME FAMOUS, OTHERS LITTLE KNOWN, ALL OF THEM ENERGIZING THEIR FOLLOWERS AND MAKING THE WORLD BETTER. By GEOFF COLVIN

Additional reporting by Catherine Dunn, Erika Fry, and the Fortune staff
WHEN A REFORMER SWEEPS through an institution more forcefully in just a year than any other in memory—and when that institution is some 2,000 years old and the largest organization on earth—he draws attention, admiration, and wonder. That’s why Pope Francis leads our inaugural list of the World’s Greatest Leaders, and why he was proposed more often by our nominators than any other candidate. Reforming the scandal-plagued Vatican bank, finally beginning to address the child sexual abuse scandal, shaking up the Vatican’s self-absorbed bureaucracy, setting a striking new tone through his personal example of modesty and inclusiveness—this is what a great leader does.

The world yearns for such leadership. Only 21% of those surveyed globally say they trust business leaders to “make ethical and moral decisions,” says the Edelman communication firm’s latest Trust Barometer; only 15% trust government leaders to do so. Maybe the problem is that as the world changes and challenges multiply faster, delivering great leadership is getting harder. We hear it from others and feel it ourselves: The leaders we need are frequently just not there. So we went in search of them.

The great news is, we found scores of extraordinary individuals—so many that it was hard to winnow down our selections to just 50. (We’ve included one three-way tie.) We found inspiring, impressive leaders in every field of endeavor across the globe. On six continents—in business, government, the military, philanthropy, religion—we identified men and women, young and old, who are leading the way people want to be led. Crave to be led. Some, like the Pope, are world famous; many you’ve never heard of.

Choosing them necessarily required judgment. “There is no formula for leadership,” says Leading Marines, a book that all U.S. Marines are required to read, and on this we may regard the Marines as authoritative. So we cast our net broadly to include leaders—of strictly hierarchical organizations (including the Marines) as well as others whose followers may owe no formal duty to the leader but who look to that person for inspiration and guidance. Some of our leaders, such as Alibaba chief Jack Ma (No. 16), are visionaries who inspire others to follow them toward a goal only they may see clearly; others, like Ford CEO Alan Mulally (No. 3), rescue institutions in trouble. Some, such as sports coaches, compete and win; others, like social entrepreneurs, cooperate and give.

We have drawn a distinction between leaders and people who are admirable and powerful but who are not transformative leaders. Simply running a large organization or serving in an influential role does not meet the threshold to be on this list. All candidates had to be currently active; thus no retirees or recently deceased great leaders, such as Nelson Mandela. We asked several noted leadership experts to suggest candidates, combined their ideas with others turned up by Fortune reporters, and vetted our nominees with experts in their respective fields. Then we made our final judgments based on the reality that while leadership can’t be measured, we all know it when we see it.

“A leader’s job is to define reality and give hope,” says American Express CEO Ken Chenault (No. 18). In an environment that often feels leader-deficient, our list exposes the reality that the world is actually filled with knockout leaders. And does it ever give hope.

For online extras including the best “Dynamic Leadership Duos,” our “Worst Leaders” list, and video interviews, see Fortune.com/BestLeaders.
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Merkel may be the most successful national leader in the world today. She is, practically speaking, the leader of the European Union, which as a whole is the world’s largest economy, and Merkel has held that position for almost nine years. She played the lead role in managing Europe’s debt crisis, keeping the EU intact while setting even Greece on the road to recovery.

Ford’s miracle worker saved the company without resorting to bankruptcy or bailouts by doing what previous leaders had tried and failed to do: change Ford’s risk-averse, reality-denying, CYA-based culture. After earning $7.2 billion of profit last year—far more than General Motors or Chrysler—the company paid its 47,000 UAW workers a record $8,800 each in profit sharing.

While lauded as an investor, Buffett also leads 300,000 employees with a values-based, hands-off style that gives managers wide leeway and incentivizes them like owners. The result is America’s fifth-most-valuable company. His influence extends much further than that, though: The world looks to the “Oracle of Omaha” for guidance on investing, the economy, taxes, management, philanthropy, and more.

In the 13 years since he left office, President Clinton has been a relentless and forceful advocate for a number of causes: the fight against HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis, and the need to stem greenhouse gas emissions. Through his Clinton Global Initiative, he persuades billionaires, heads of state, and others to declare commitments (2,360 so far) to specific projects. (For more, see our interview with President Clinton in this package.)
CLINTON ON LEADERSHIP

The former President distills his wisdom for Fortune.

How did you learn to be a leader?
I learned when I was very young to respect the human dignity of everyone I met, to observe them closely and listen to them carefully. From the adults in my extended family, I learned that everybody has a story but not everyone can tell it. I learned that most of life's greatest wounds are self-inflicted, that trying and failing is far better than not trying at all, that everyone makes mistakes but most people are basically good. As a boy growing up in the civil rights years, then during Vietnam, I came to see politics as a way to help other people make their own life stories better. All along the way I learned a lot from other leaders, especially those who befriended me and shared their own experiences. Yitzhak Rabin reminded me that you don't make peace with your friends. Nelson Mandela told me and showed me that you can't be a great leader if you're driven by resentment and hatred, no matter how justified those feelings are. To be free to lead, you have to let a lot of things go. I'm grateful to the many others who taught me to look for the dreams and hurts, hopes and fears, in the eyes of everyone I met.

Who are the great leaders in your mind?
There are too many to mention so I'll stick with a few. Nelson Mandela and Yitzhak Rabin were great for the reasons I mentioned and many more. Helmut Kohl oversaw the reunification of Germany, the European Union, and the creation of the eurozone.

Bill and Melinda Gates have built their amazing foundation, which is saving and lifting countless lives, driven by the principle that every life has equal value. They've selflessly given their money, time, and know-how to help solve global health and development problems. Muhammad Yunus and Fazle Abed have empowered huge numbers of poor people to live more productive lives.

Aung San Suu Kyi's dignified determination helped open her country to the world and inspired women and girls across the world.

For more leadership lessons, see our tablet and Fortune.com/BestLeaders.
The Marine four-star general and leader of NATO's coalition in Afghanistan "is probably the most complete warrior-statesman wearing a uniform today," says a former Marine commandant. Dunford tells Fortune his first battalion commander told him the three rules to success. The first? Surround yourself with good people. "Over the years," says Dunford, "I've forgotten the other two."

"Real leadership is when everyone else feels in charge," Bono tells Fortune. And he has lived by this maxim. He helped persuade global leaders to write off debt owed by the poorest countries and encouraged the Bush administration and others to vastly increase AIDS relief. Now, through his ONE and (RED) campaigns, he is enlisting major companies and millions of people to combat AIDS, poverty, and preventable diseases.

Dissatisfied with the results of most organizations helping the urban poor in the mid-1990s, Canada launched an experiment, an effort to reach all the kids in a 24-block zone of New York City—he called it the Harlem Children's Zone—and give them education, social, and medical help starting at birth. The idea was to make success a self-reinforcing phenomenon, as children and their families saw it all around them and re-calibrated their expectations. The experiment has worked spectacularly. The zone now covers over 100 blocks and serves more than 12,000 children, with 95% of high school seniors going off to college. Canada plans to step down as CEO later this year, but his idea—and leadership here—will no doubt endure.

Bezos is an extremely rare combination of visionary and master builder—20 years ago seeing something no one else could see and then turning it into the world's No. 2 Most Admired Company (after Apple) on our list, with a recent market value of $174 billion. Prospective employees are still drawn to his vision; though he's highly demanding, thousands aspire to work for him. That's one way to know a great leader when you see one.

As he begins his 20th and final season in pinstripes, Jeter remains the type of role-model player that even a Red Sox fan must grudgingly respect. It's not the five World Series rings he's won or his team record for career hits. In a steroid-tainted, reality-TV era, Jeter, the son of two Army veterans, continues to stand out because of his old-school approach: Never offer excuses or give less than maximum effort.
PAUL POLMAN
57, CEO / UNILEVER

With rare skill, Polman has combined noble corporate goals with savvy management in his five years as CEO. Of course, strong leadership also often goes hand in hand with bold ambition: Polman took a big risk by declaring his—double the company’s size even while reducing its environmental footprint and increasing its positive societal impact. He is pulling it off and energizing employees in the process.

MICHAEL BLOOMBERG
72, MAJORITY OWNER / BLOOMBERG L.P.

Bloomberg maintained high approval ratings for nearly all of his 12 years as New York City’s mayor (2002–14), winning his first re-election by a 20-point margin, the largest ever for a Republican in the heavily Democratic city. He has now returned to the financial data firm he founded but is hardly giving up his high-wattage policy activism—leading campaigns for gun control and against smoking and obesity.

JACK MA
48, EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN / ALIBABA GROUP

Ma became a billionaire not just through brilliant management but also by leading his company in a big, brash way. From the day in 1999 when he founded Alibaba in a Hangzhou apartment, he has exported employees to “think big” and “work for their dreams!” He did that himself and built Alibaba into the world’s largest online business, with some 100 million shoppers a day and higher revenues than Amazon and eBay combined.

TIE

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI
67, HEAD COACH / DUKE UNIVERSITY
MEN’S BASKETBALL TEAM

GREGG POPOVICH
65, HEAD COACH / SAN ANTONIO SPURS

DAWN STALEY
43, HEAD COACH / UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA
WOMEN’S BASKETBALL TEAM

There’s no playbook for how to become an elite leader in basketball. Whether it’s John Wooden teaching his UCLA players the proper way to tie their shoes or Zen master (and new Knicks president) Phil Jackson referencing Buddha, the point is to get five players working in harmony—however you do it. Three active coaches with very different styles stand out. We’re hard-pressed to say which is best: Duke’s Coach K (above, right), who has developed players for decades with a mixture of toughness and love—in the process becoming the winningest Division I men’s college basketball coach in history and leading the U.S. Olympic men’s basketball team to a pair of gold medals? Or the famously terse Coach Pop, who empowers his players by sometimes stepping back? “What do you want me to do?” he has challenged his stars in a time-out. “Figure it out.” And they do: Coach Pop has had more consecutive winning seasons (16) than any active NBA coach. Or Dawn Staley, who has led women’s teams at Temple and South Carolina to storied records? The former WNBA star initially didn’t want to coach. But as Staley noted at her induction into the National Basketball Hall of Fame in 2013, she knew she made the right decision when “I started to care more about my players than to win.” That might be the common trait of the great ones.
ANGELINA JOLIE
38, ACTRESS, HUMANITARIAN

There's no such thing as a fleeting cause célèbre for Jolie; since joining forces with the UN's refugee agency in 2001, first as a goodwill ambassador and now as special envoy, she's undertaken 50 field missions to countries including Iraq, Syria, and Pakistan. Her decision to explain her preeminent double mastectomy in a New York Times editorial, though controversial in some health circles, underscored her willingness to foster hard conversations by taking a public stand. "Angelina Jolie represents a new type of leadership in the 21st century," says U.K. Foreign Secretary William Hague, who has worked with Jolie on efforts to end a plague of rape in war-torn regions. "Her strength lies in the fact that she is able to influence governments and move public opinion at the same time." That Jolie chooses to use her global influence to highlight neglected human rights and humanitarian issues, adds Hague, "is in keeping with the finest traditions of leadership."

ZHANG RUIMIN
65, CEO / HAIER GROUP

His radical management innovations have transformed Haier from a small, failing, state-owned refrigerator maker into the world's largest appliance brand. He groups employees into small, self-managing teams that choose their own managers, compete for internal talent, and can earn big bonuses—unusual in the West and unheard-of in China.

CARLOS GHOSN
60, CEO / NISSAN; CEO / RENAULT

Rescuing a giant, old industrial corporation in decline is almost impossible; few leaders have ever done it. Fewer still—maybe none except Ghosn—have done it while also a top executive at a separate industrial giant on the other side of the world. His salvation of Nissan from 1999 to 2005 remains "one of the most dramatic turnarounds in the history of the modern corporation," says McKinsey. He did it by smashing Japanese cultural norms—laying off thousands of workers and cutting ties with members of the Nissan keiretsu. Japanese citizens and media were enraged, but the shock treatment worked, and Ghosn soon became a Japanese hero, his exploits even celebrated in a manga comic book. No wonder the Insead business school calls Ghosn a "transcultural leader."

GABRIELLE GIFFORDS
43, CO-FOUNDER / AMERICANS FOR RESPONSIBLE SOLUTIONS (ARS)

Three years after she was shot at a Tucson supermarket, the former Arizona congresswoman has become a major force in the effort to end the plague of gun violence. In 2013 she and husband Mark Kelly, both gun owners, launched a Super PAC, Ars, a move that Daniel Webster, director of John Hopkins' Center for Gun Policy and Research, calls a true "game changer."

WENDY KOPP
46, CEO AND CO-FOUNDER / TEACH FOR ALL

Twenty-five years after turning her Princeton senior thesis into a national education reform program called Teach for America, Kopp is taking her model global. A lowego leader with big dreams, the 46-year-old Kopp has recruited social entrepreneurs in 32 countries to become teachers in underfunded public schools. Her aim? "To narrow educational disparities around the world."

FRED SMITH
68, CEO / FEDEX

Smith created a world-changing industry—overnight air delivery—that no one knew they needed until finding they couldn't live without it. His ability to continue leading FedEx to be bigger and more successful for 40 years is nearly unique and has sparked such transformative improvements as online package tracking. He's still pushing and is a hero to the company's 300,000 employees.

JULIET V. GARCIA
64, PRESIDENT / UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT BROWNSVILLE

Garcia has utterly reengineered educational opportunities for Hispanics in South Texas, forging, in 1981, the innovative partnership between a community college and the UT system, and helping create UTRio Grande Valley, opening in 2015. Ford Foundation president Darren Walker lauds her "rare capacity" for bridging grassroots and elites.
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MARY ROBINSON
69, PRESIDENT / MARY ROBINSON FOUNDATION—CLIMATE JUSTICE

As the first female president of Ireland, Robinson broke barriers. As a long-serving UN high commissioner for human rights, she framed crimes against humanity in strikingly personal terms. Now, through her foundation, she is vividly—and convincingly—showing the world how climate change is affecting the poorest of the poor.

29

HOWARD SCHULTZ
60, CEO / STARBUCKS

A small Seattle coffee retailer has become 20,000 shops worldwide under Schultz’s leadership, with many more planned. Crucially, he understood that he was creating an experience, not selling a product. Far ahead of most CEOs, he saw the value of offering medical insurance to all employees, even part-timers, and pursuing environmental and social projects that inspire employees and attract customers.

30

JOSÉ ANTONIO ABRUE
74, FOUNDER / EL SISTEMA

Abreu started El Sistema in a garage with 11 musicians in 1975. Today it teaches music to 400,000 poor kids in Venezuela and has inspired similar programs worldwide. Its value is that it teaches not just music but also discipline, practice, cooperation, and culture. A canny leader, Abreu has cultivated support from Venezuela’s many varying governments over the past 39 years.

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MALALA YOUSAFZAI
16, ADVOCATE FOR EDUCATION RIGHTS

Malala Yousafzai first stood up to the Taliban when she was 11. A fierce and outspoken defender of a female’s right to education, the Swat Valley schoolgirl was shot by them four years later aboard her school bus. The senseless act stunned the world, just as her recovery and continued activism—despite more death threats—have drawn many to her cause. Bette Sheppard of Human Rights Watch calls Malala “a radiant example that children can be intelligent and savvy advocates for their own rights.”

STRIVE MASITYA
53, FOUNDER & CHAIRMAN / ECONET WIRELESS

Nearly two decades ago Masitya fought and won a key court battle to open Zimbabwe’s telecom industry to private investment. Masitya, who sits on the Africa Progress Panel as well as the boards of Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa and the Rockefeller Foundation, is a persuasive advocate for development opportunities and the creation of strong government institutions. “He is truly one of Africa’s most influential figures, with his good counsel sought by world leaders and CEOs,” says Rockefeller Foundation president Judith Rodin, who calls him “a champion for the power of technology to improve the lives of millions.”
36
GEORGE KENNEDY
56, HEAD COACH / JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY SWIM TEAMS

Kennedy is in his 29th coaching season at Johns Hopkins, but veterans of his swim teams say you'd never know it. Kennedy sees not just each season, but each meet as a new chance to change things up. Maybe that's how his teams have won 23 conference titles and had 17 top-five NCAA finishes. "My four favorite words," he says, are "We can do better."

37
JOKO WIDODO
52, GOVERNOR / JAKARTA, INDONESIA

In 2005 the self-made furniture exporter was elected mayor of Solo, a 500,000-person city in Indonesia, "Jokowi," as he's known, cleaned up the city and rooted out corruption, thrilling an Indonesian public weary of the status quo. His ascent since then has been swift. In 2012 he became governor of Jakarta. Now he's the favorite for Indonesia's July 2014 presidential election.

38
ERIC GREITENS
39, FOUNDER & CEO / THE MISSION CONTINUES

"I think fundamentally leadership is a species of courage," says Missouri-bred Greitens, a former Navy SEAL and a Rhodes Scholar. "A lot of people approach leadership from a different perspective, but for me a true leader is someone who confronts fear, embraces pain, and welcomes suffering. It's on the front-line of hardship, pain, and difficulty that leaders really make a difference." In 2007, Greitens took his commitment back to the frontlines, founding a nonprofit organization that serves post-9/11 veterans by deploying them to service projects across the country. It's about providing them with "a challenge, not charity," he says—and changing the way Americans, and the veterans themselves, think about veterans.

39
WYNTON MARSALIS
52, MANAGING AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR / JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER

Call him the guardian of American jazz: Pulitzer Prize winner Marsalis has relentlessly played, composed, and taught throughout his career, and built Jazz at Lincoln Center into a bastion of the art form. Moreover, "he has developed a generation of musicians," says longtime friend and American Express CEO Ken Chenault.

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ANAND MAHINDRA
58, CHAIRMAN / MAHINDRA & MAHINDRA

A third-generation corporate aristocrat, Mahindra has aggressively expanded the big conglomerate through acquisitions in autos, computer services, aeronautics, and more, while maintaining the company's standing as one of India's most sought-after employers. The company remains well regarded in Indian society as he has reinforced a policy of integrity in a notoriously corrupt environment.

41
NANCY LUBLIN
42, CEO / DO SOMETHING

Lublin is a standout among social entrepreneurs. Back in 1996, at age 24, she turned a $5,000 inheritance into Dress for Success, a nonprofit that provides interview suits and career development training to women. Six years later, having finished law school at night, she became CEO of a failing nonprofit called Do Something; by embracing technology, she created one of the largest youth organizations in the world.

45
SUSAN WOJCICKI
CEO / YOUTUBE

Google's employee No. 16 officially joined the company in 1999 as its first marketing manager, just a year after Larry Page and Sergey Brin set up their first office in her Menlo Park, Calif., garage. Widely admired within the Googleplex for her management style, Wojcicki was instrumental in guiding the evolution of the company's hugely successful advertising and commerce platforms. Now, many expect Wojcicki, who took the helm of Google's YouTube division in February, to rev up the troops there.

43
PETER DIAMANDIS
52, CEO / X PRIZE FOUNDATION

Apart from the 14 other companies he has founded, Diamandis presides over X Prize Foundation, which hosts $10 million competitions to solve global problems. "He has an infectious optimism, which becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy," says futurist Ray Kurzweil. He makes "each person understand that their role is critical to the success of their organization and in turn that the overall project is critical to transforming the world."
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George W. Casey Jr. was Army Chief of Staff and Commanding General of the Multinational Force in Iraq. He is now a consultant with the Minot Group and a Distinguished Senior Lecturer of Leadership at Cornell.

clearer I could be—even if I wasn’t exactly right—the better we executed. Without a clear focus, there was no common purpose, and without common purpose, there wasn’t effective execution. In war—and business—that is fatal.

Consider my experience in Iraq. When I took command in July 2004, I had about 30 days to come to grips with the new environment, build a relationship with the new Iraqi government, and develop a plan for succeeding, all the while keeping a burgeoning insurgency at bay. I had a lot on my plate.

Then, almost immediately, we confronted a country-wide uprising after a young Marine made a wrong turn and drove too close to a militia leader’s house in the key city of Najaf, home to the Imam Ali Mosque, the third-holiest site in Shia Islam. In response the militia leader, Muqtada al-Sadr, whose forces had been terrorizing the population of Najaf for months, rapidly mobilized his forces in Najaf, Baghdad, and southern Iraq, and fighting escalated. That’s volatility.

With an inexperienced Iraqi government, a mere two battalions in the Iraqi army, 162,000 coalition forces from 33 countries engaged in a form of combat for which they had not prepared, in a culture they didn’t fully understand or appreciate, and against a diverse and committed enemy, our ability to achieve our desired outcome was hugely uncertain. In addition, Iraq was the most complex environment I had ever experienced. I had to consider not only what the U.S. government wanted but also how our decisions would affect the Iraqi government, our coalition of 33 countries, and the varying Iraqi factions—and that was just our side. In war the enemy has a vote. On almost every issue I had to consider multiple and competing internal and external variables that, if I chose incorrectly, could produce undesirable outcomes.

Ambiguity? The reporting that I received was all over the map—Sadr had been killed! No, he was just wounded. An errant bomb had damaged the mosque! No, it was the hotel next door. The Iraqi Special Forces had arrived! No, they were still on the way.

VUCA conditions conspired to postpone action. Yet I had to act fast because my troops were under attack.

Over the years I had developed an offensive mindset—I worked aggressively and opportunistically to gain an advantage. That attitude kept me from being cowed by the complexity and ambiguity of the situation, and I was able to perform a leader’s first duty—to point a clear way ahead. I quickly saw the battle for Najaf as an opportunity for the new Iraqi government to demonstrate its strength. In less than 24 hours, I consulted with the Prime Minister and instructed my forces to restore Iraqi government control of Najaf, which in the following weeks they did. The Prime Minister had his first victory.

I got the chance to apply what I had learned in Iraq when I became the Army Chief of Staff in 2007. As I began developing my vision to guide the Army through my four-year tenure, I initially thought it would be something flashy, like “America’s Army—an agile, disciplined warrior team, dominant across the spectrum of 21st-century conflict.” I couldn’t have been more wrong.

In a four-month tour of the Army, talking with men and women of all ranks, I found an organization stretched by six years of war and facing another five to 10 years of continual deployments. Over 3,000 soldiers had given their lives, leaving 10,000 surviving family members. Another 25,000 soldiers had been wounded, some 5,000 seriously enough to require long-term care. We also were just beginning to come to grips with the impacts of post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injury on thousands of soldiers. In all the turbulence, readiness suffered. The magnificent volunteer force that we had built so painstakingly since the early 1970s was seriously frayed.

I came to see the Army as out of balance—so weighed down by current demands that we couldn’t adequately care for soldiers or prepare for the future. I realized that when you are out of balance, there is only one thing to do: Get back in balance. I thus arrived at a simple—and clear—vision statement: “Put the Army Back in Balance.” It wasn’t quite so glamorous a vision as I had originally imagined, but because it was clear, it guided a Herculean Army-wide effort that left us in a fundamentally different and better position four years later.

Leaders are human and possess only so much intellectual and emotional energy. To succeed in a VUCA world, we must expend that energy in the areas that produce the highest payoff for our organizations. Our first priority must be developing and articulating a clear vision to drive our organizations’ actions. The clearer leaders can be about what they want to accomplish, the better their organizations will execute in the volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity of today’s global business environment.
I WAS RECENTLY ASKED TO ADDRESS THE STUDENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF North Carolina’s Kenan-Flagler Business School on “Leading in a VUCA World.” I must admit that as soon as I got off the call with the school’s executive director, I went to the computer and Googled “VUCA.” Ten seconds later it was clear why the acronym was vaguely familiar to me: It was a term coined by the U.S. Army War College in the early 1990s to describe what the world would be like after the Soviet Union’s collapse: volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous.

In reality, VUCA has never been more relevant, for the military and for business. I experienced VUCA environments in Bosnia (1996), in Kosovo (2000), and in Iraq (2004–07). Leading grew progressively more difficult in those conflicts, with Iraq unquestionably the toughest. I believe that my experiences of leading in those environments can benefit business leaders.

The reason is that the primary function of any leader is to point the way ahead. I’ve learned that doing so in VUCA environments is extraordinarily difficult. Leaders need to “see around corners”—to see something significant about the future that others don’t see. Yet the more VUCA the environment, the harder it is for leaders themselves to comprehend the situation, let alone articulate a clear way forward. VUCA environments thus become invitations for inaction—people are befuddled by the turmoil and don’t act. And to succeed, you must act!

Effective action begins with a clear statement of what needs to be accomplished. As the commander in Iraq and later as the Army Chief of Staff, I made the No. 1 question I asked: “What are we really trying to accomplish?” The higher in the organization I was, the more complex the issues became and the harder it was for me to answer that question clearly and succinctly. I had to force myself to get clarity in my own mind so that I could clearly articulate to my subordinates how I saw things and what I wanted them to do. I found that the