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LEADERSHIP FORK IN THE ROAD

The defining moments of truth: the fork in the road.

A human-centered leadership approach to the moments that test and shape us. Michael Lane Morris, PhD

Photo by [@mishkayev](#) on Unsplash

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02

DEFINING HUMAN-CENTERED LEADERSHIP

The process of inspiring and mobilizing people to co-creatively tackle tough challenges and do things that matter.

Michael Lane Morris and Jules Morris

Photo by [@kristiankotar](#) on Unsplash

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03

THE CREATIVE ALLIANCES SYSTEM

The fork tests your mindset and your character.

BONDS

How we feel together

Creative Climate

Positive Mindsets

Character

Collaborative Partnerships

CORE CONDITIONS

TASKS & TOOLS

What we do together

Understand

Dream

Flourish

Experiment

CO-CREATION

TRANSITIONS

GOALS

What we achieve

Engagement

Efficiency

Experience

Expansion

EFFECTIVENESS

EXCELLENCE

Creative Alliances System™ © 2026 BombDiggity, LLC.

Text version of this diagram

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## SESSION OBJECTIVES

04

## What to do when tough challenges come to you.

### 01 Stay inspired

Explore how to remain inspired and mobilized to do the things that matter when tough challenges hit.

### 02 Know yourself

Build self-awareness by analyzing your own defining moments of truth: disappointments, obstacles, setbacks and trials.

### 03 Trace the change

Examine how those moments altered and redirected your life.

### 04 Name the lessons

Identify the leadership lessons you learned from them.

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## THE LEADER'S FORK IN THE ROAD

05

## Defining moments shape and test us.

Every leader's developmental journey includes significant defining moments and tough challenges.

#### Events

What happens to us.

#### Experiences

What we live through.

#### Personalities

The people who challenge us.

#### Tensile strength

Together they shape, mold and test our character.

Photo by [jennschadewinger](#) on Unsplash

## TRIGGER EVENTS, PEOPLE AND STRESSORS

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## Major, unplanned and unexpected.

Defining moments of truth: the tough challenges that influence or alter what comes next.

### Successes and failures

### Significant gains and losses

### Celebrations and disappointments

### Internal conflicts **Setbacks**

### Trials and tribulations

### Lucky breaks and irritations

### Obstacles and roadblocks

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DEFINING MOMENTS: TRIGGER EXAMPLES

**You have had a few of these.**

|                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  <p><b>A job</b></p> <p>Starting a job, or losing one.</p>                           |  <p><b>Passed over</b></p> <p>Unfairly passed over for a promotion.</p>                      |  <p><b>A rating</b></p> <p>"Meets expectations" when you clearly exceeded them.</p> |
|  <p><b>A relationship</b></p> <p>Beginning or losing a significant relationship.</p> |  <p><b>Life-threatening news</b></p> <p>A diagnosis or an event that changes everything.</p> |  <p><b>Harsh words</b></p> <p>Being told you will never amount to anything.</p>     |
|  <p><b>Mistreatment</b></p> <p>Being harassed or bullied.</p>                        |  <p><b>Finishing school</b></p> <p>A milestone that closes a chapter.</p>                    |  <p><b>Paying off debt</b></p> <p>A weight lifted.</p>                              |

Photo by @michaelbwiedner on Unsplash

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08

FORK IN THE ROAD

**A critical and decisive turning point.**

For the developing leader, a defining moment creates a fork in the road: an opportunity for change, and a chance to reformulate your leadership DNA.

Photo by @lilia\_nicole on Unsplash

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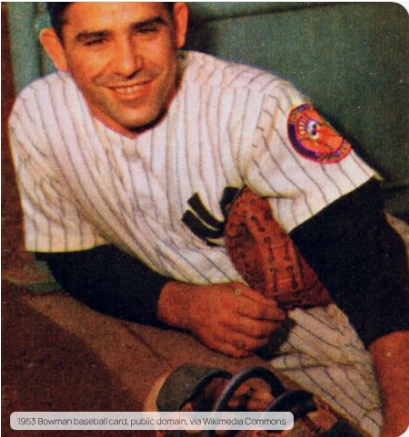
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FORK-IN-THE-ROAD QUOTES

**"When you come to a fork in the road, take it."**

Yogi Berra, New York Yankees Hall of Fame catcher



1953 Bowman baseball card, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

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FORK-IN-THE-ROAD QUOTES

**“At every fork in the road, you make a choice. And it is those decisions that shape our lives.”**

“One of the most important things that I have learned in my 57 years is that life is all about choices. On every journey you take, you face choices.” Mike DeWine, then Ohio Attorney General

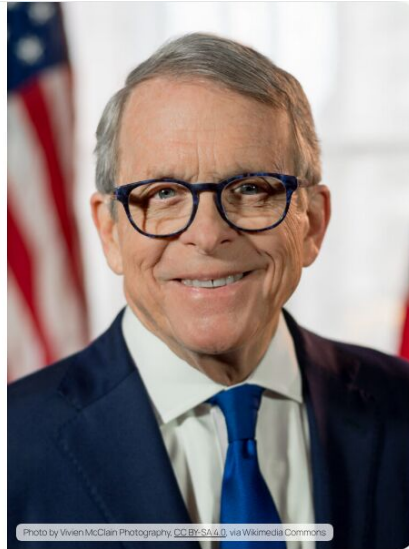


Photo by Vivien McClean Photography, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

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THE LEADER'S TWO CHOICES

**How you react matters.**

THE NEGATIVE FORK

**Fixed mindset**

Revenge, payback, getting even

THE POSITIVE FORK

**Growth mindset**

Reframe, realign, rise above

How you react  
**matters.**

**A defining moment**

a trigger event, person or stressor

+ Text version of this diagram

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MINDSETS MATTER

**“What we believe about ourselves influences our ability to get what we want out of life.”**

**Entity theory: a fixed mindset (the negative fork)**

- “To be honest, you can’t really change how intelligent you are.”
- “People are born with a fixed amount of empathy, and a person can’t do much to change it.”

VS

**Incremental theory: a growth mindset (the positive fork)**

- “You can considerably change your basic intelligence level.”
- “People can always change how much empathy they generally feel toward others.”

Carol Dweck, implicit theories of intelligence and empathy.

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**FORK 1: THE NEGATIVE FORK**

## The fixed approach leads to dead ends.

A fixed mindset leads to the desire to take dead-end actions that are ultimately destructive or unproductive, for yourself and others.

- Revenge**  
Seek vengeance and get even.
- Payback**  
Retaliate and settle the score.
- Correct the injustice**  
On your own terms.
- Lost confidence**  
And lost self-esteem.

Photo by @paul\_1865 on Unsplash

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**THE NEGATIVE FORK, CONTINUED**

## Natural feelings, dangerous fuel.

Because of the trigger event, people or stressor, it is natural for the developing leader to feel:

**Hostility** **Hurt** *Betrayal* **Disappointment**  
**Anger** **Bitterness** *Frustration*

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**THE NEGATIVE FORK, UNCHECKED**

## Bitterness narrows what is possible.

If left unchecked, unchanged or not redirected, these emotions produce negative outcomes. Some offended, bitter leaders never fully recover, and their possibility and potential are narrowed, minimized or stunted.

Photo by @paul\_1865 on Unsplash

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FORK 2: THE POSITIVE FORK

## The growth approach looks inside.

**Look inside**  
The developing leader looks inside themselves.

**Reframe**  
They reframe and realign their mindset.

**Use the moment**  
The trigger becomes an opportunity to do something better: more positive, more productive, more growth.



Photo by @gabibhemplatz on Unsplash

THE POSITIVE FORK, CONTINUED

## Redirect the feelings toward results.

Rather than trying to get even, positive leaders redirect anger, hostility, injustice and bitterness to achieve results that are:

**Bigger Better Prosper Rise above Growth Learning**

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DEFINING MOMENTS AS FUEL

## The moment becomes the catalyst.

A mindset shift inspires, motivates and challenges the leader to reach a higher-ordered goal, like being a better person. Play the infinite game, not the finite one.

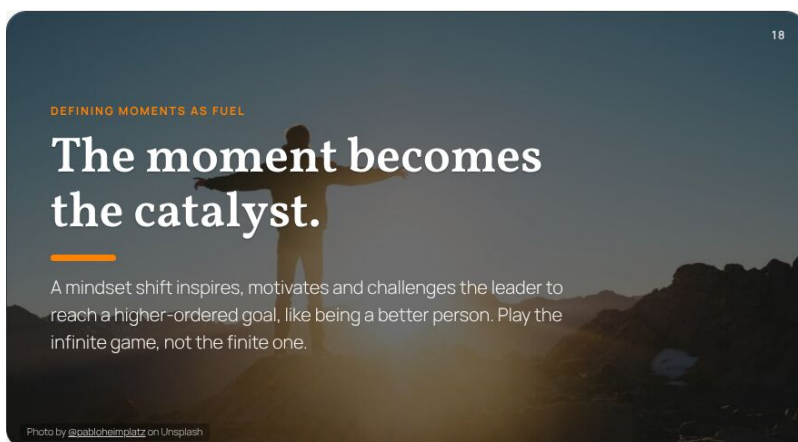


Photo by @gabibhemplatz on Unsplash

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THE POSITIVE FORK, CONTINUED

## A healthier form of revenge.

In essence, the leader pursues a healthier, more positive form of revenge.

**Revenge: the dark side**

- A maladaptive response
- Pursued through unproductive means

VS

**Productive revenge ©**

- A bona-adaptive, transformative coping response
- Pursued through productive means

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PRODUCTIVE REVENGE: THE LIGHT SIDE OF REVENGE

## Productive Revenge ©

Michael Lane Morris, Joyce T. Heames and Joshua Ray

Photo by @arho\_ on Unsplash

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INTRODUCING PRODUCTIVE REVENGE ©

## Get better, not even.

An antifragile coping response. Like a bowl mended with gold, the break becomes part of the strength.

**Focus on you**  
Not on them.

**Energizing fuel**  
To get better, not get even.

**Fail your way to success**  
A positive catalyst for change, growth and discovery.

**Reframing actions**  
Reinvention, redirection, renewal, restoration, regeneration.

Photo by @arho\_ on Unsplash

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REVENGE VS. PRODUCTIVE REVENGE

Two very different energies.

Revenge

- Other-focused
- A retributive act, usually driven by emotion, to return pain and settle the score
- Wrongdoing that warrants a punitive response
- Negative energy: a vampire
- Past-focused: stuck

VS

Productive revenge

- You-focused
- Intentional, cognitive effort to benefit from shock or volatility
- Acknowledges injustice, but I have choices
- Positive energy: a giver, a radiator
- Future-focused: I am not stuck here; I can and will build my way out

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PRODUCTIVE REVENGE: ANTIFRAGILITY

Thrive because of the stress.

An antifragility mindset increases your ability to thrive and flourish as a result of stressors, shocks, disappointments, faults and failures. It is much more than resilience, or bouncing back.

The term antifragile comes from Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *Antifragile* (2012).



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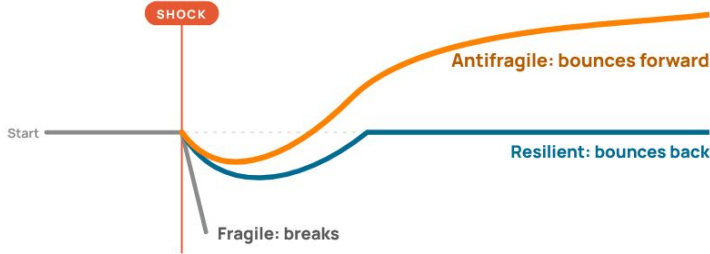
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GROWING AND LEARNING

Resilience bounces back. Antifragility bounces forward.



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Text version of this diagram

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RESILIENCE VS. ANTIFRAGILITY

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# Survive the storm, or grow from it.

Resilience

- Withstands shocks
- Bounces back
- Returns to the status quo
- Adapts to maintain stability
- Goals: survival and recovery
- Example: a business survives a recession by cutting costs

VS

Antifragility

- Benefits from chaos, disorder, stress and volatility
- Bounces forward
- Improves and gets better when challenges hit
- Goals: growth and evolution
- Example: a business innovates and gains market share during a crisis

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THE CHALLENGES OF THE FORK.  
Seven C's at every fork.

Curiosity

How might this be better?

Catalyst

Let energy follow your passion.

Crucible

You can stand the heat.

Courage

This is not going to be easy.

Character

What are you made of?

Choice

You decide.

Change

The status quo is over.

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FORK-IN-THE-ROAD EXERCISE ©

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# A lesson in failing your way to success.

Photo by [@madcityjane](#) on Unsplash

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BESSEMER VENTURE PARTNERS (BVP)

## The anti-portfolio.

One of the oldest venture capital firms in the United States keeps a public list of the famous companies it passed on, and what it learned.

[See the BVP anti-portfolio](#)

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BVP FRONT-LINE FAILURE EXAMPLES

## The deals they passed on (1).

1

### Airbnb

Met in January 2010, the first \$100K revenue month. The \$40M valuation seemed crazy. By April, Airbnb raised at 1.5 times that price.

2

### Apple

Offered pre-IPO stock at a \$60M valuation, which a partner called outrageously expensive.

3

### eBay

"Stamps? Coins? Comic books? You've got to be kidding." A no-brainer pass.

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### Facebook

"Kid, haven't you heard of Friendster? Move on. It's over!" (2004)

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BVP FRONT-LINE FAILURE EXAMPLES

## The deals they passed on (2).

### 01 FedEx

BVP passed on Federal Express seven times.

### 02 Google

A friend rented her garage to Sergey and Larry. The partner asked how to leave the house without going near the garage.

### 03 Lotus and Compaq

Offered both on the same day. "No real future in transportable computers."

### 04 PayPal

Rookie team and a regulatory nightmare. Four years later, a \$1.5 billion acquisition by eBay.

### 05 Kayak

A fatal flaw: airlines would not pay. Hotels did, and Priceline bought Kayak for \$1.8 billion.

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YOUR TRADITIONAL RESUME VS. YOUR FAILURE RESUME

### Write the resume nobody asks for.

**Your traditional resume**

- A showcase of your professional history
- Shows off your knowledge, skills and abilities
- Positive action verbs
- A picture of your best self

VS

**Your failure resume**

- Starts with a defining moment, the fork and a new antifragile mindset
- Where change and growth begin
- Embarrassment becomes enlightenment
- Fail your way to meaningful success
- The message: you are good enough

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A FAILURE RESUME: WHY?

### Your failures hold your best lessons.

**01 Your difficult challenges**

Identify them.

**02 Proof of overcoming**

Examples you can draw on.

**03 How to learn and adapt**

To do the things that really matter.

**04 Fuel**

For productive revenge and antifragility.

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LIVING EXAMPLES: PRODUCTIVE REVENGE

### Candy Lightner: grief into a movement.

In 1980, Candy Lightner's 13-year-old daughter, Cari, was killed by a hit-and-run drunk driver who had been arrested for drunk driving before. Sitting in her daughter's room, she decided to do something about it.

**The fork**

Grief, and a system that shrugged at drunk driving.

**The response**

She founded Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD).



Photo by Lance Cpl. Nathan Kragstad, U.S. Marine Corps, public domain

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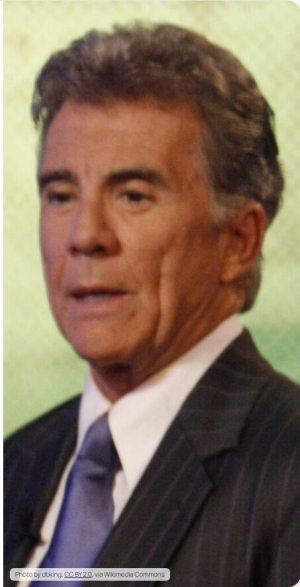
LIVING EXAMPLES: PRODUCTIVE REVENGE

## John and Revé Walsh: loss into protection.

In 1981, their six-year-old son, Adam, was abducted from a Florida department store and murdered. The Walshes turned their loss into advocacy for missing children and victims' rights.

**The center**  
Helped found the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

**The laws**  
The Missing Children Act of 1982, the Missing Children's Assistance Act of 1984, and the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006.



(Photo by iStock CC-BY 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons)

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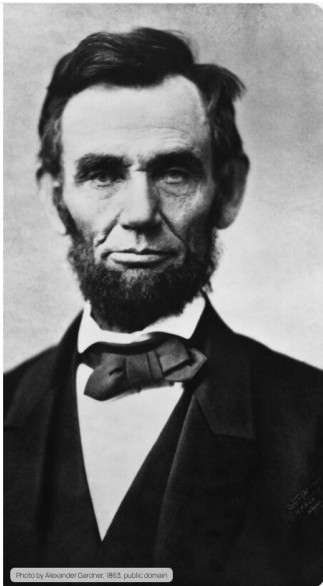
LIVING EXAMPLES: PRODUCTIVE REVENGE

## Told no. Did it anyway.

**Abraham Lincoln**  
Called lazy as a child and failed as a store owner. He became the 16th President of the United States.

**Frank Gordy**  
Dropped out of Georgia Tech after a professor told him to go open a hot dog stand. He founded The Varsity, the world's largest drive-in.

**Fred Smith**  
Reportedly earned a C at Yale on a paper outlining an overnight delivery service. He founded FedEx.



(Photo by Alexander Gerashev, 1863, public domain)

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THE CHOICE IS YOURS!

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## Convert defining moments into five kinds of moments.



**Lifting moments**  
Elevation.



**Learning moments**  
Discovery and insight.



**Laudable moments**  
Celebration and pride.



**Loyalty moments**  
Sharing meaningful connections.



**Liberation moments**  
Unleashing freedom.

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Photo by gattuso on Unsplash

RELAX AND RECHARGE YOUR BATTERIES

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### Down-time is productive.

**Make time**  
Schedule time and reflection for yourself.

**Get on the balcony**  
Step back and see your life from above.

**Watch your habits**  
Monitor your personal habits and lifestyle.

**Take a real vacation**  
Rest fuels innovation and creativity.

**Know the limit**  
Past about 55 hours a week, extra hours add little or nothing.

John Pencavel, "The Productivity of Working Hours," The Economic Journal (2015).

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PROTOTYPE NEW IDEAS

### Small things, huge improvements.

**Rethink solutions**  
Solutions are sometimes the problem.

**Start small**  
Small things can improve things in huge ways.

**Many paths**  
Different strokes for different folks.

**Bias toward action**  
Get moving, and embrace failure as your path to success.

**Abundance**  
An abundance mindset multiplies; scarcity divides.



Photo by gattuso on Unsplash

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PRIORITY-DRIVEN DECISION FILTER

### Decide by what matters most.

Priorities provide focus and direction, for strategic and tactical things alike. Build a decision filter to handle the pressure points.

**People**  
The ties that bind us.

**Purpose**  
Why? Focus on something bigger than yourself.

**Passions**  
Learn how to make them valuable to other people too.

**Principles**  
Live your values: the promises we keep.

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Photo by @mckenziebault on Unsplash

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BUILD A NETWORK OF SUPPORT

**You are not alone, so don't go it alone.**

Relationships matter. Period.

**Allies are assets**  
Check in often.

**Three kinds of support**  
Emotional, informational and instrumental.

**Role models**  
Who are your work and life role models and mentors?

**Think beyond you**  
Build a shared vision.

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