

Purpose Sets the Intent, Process and Outcome



Welcome to the first *On Leadership* of 2026!

Let us make it the most **successful Influential Leadership** year of our lives—thus far—there is still much to improve and do better.

We start the year with a three-part series titled: *Where to Start?*

Edition 0126 opens the scene, the next completes the context and the third offers a practical exercise.

Part I: Where to Start

Last year I asked *On Leadership* subscribers to provide feedback about the value, nature and content of the publication.

On the content front, two subject areas were identified as most valuable:

- α** How Influential Leadership could resolve the “big issues” of our time.
- α** How to practice Influential Leadership within the context of each person’s lived life.

While these two matters are at opposite ends of the scale, their subject matter is the same—and they are, **Leadership Moments**.

As we shall see, the “big issues” exist when millions fail to lead over extended periods. Recall our conversations about bullying, corruption and so forth. They do not start as endemic conditions, they begin singularly. When you and I and others fail to lead, the “little personal thing” expands and spreads and infests until it becomes normalised.

The principle to appreciate is that “small things”—be they productive or destructive—if not nurtured or nipped in the bud, they gain momentum and become normalised, but with very different outcomes.

The two contrasting notions of “virtuous cycles” and “vicious cycles” illustrate this principle.

The classic “virtuous cycle” versus “vicious cycle” describes this principle

A **virtuous cycle** and a **vicious cycle** describe two self-reinforcing patterns that shape lives, organisations and societies over time. The difference between them is not luck or circumstance—it is the **presence or absence of Influential Leadership**.

The Virtuous Cycle

(Where Influential Leadership is practised)

Influential Leadership introduces **intentional agency** into a system. People think critically, choose responsibly, and act productively. Those actions improve conditions, which in turn expand future choices.

How the cycle works:

- α **Clear purpose** guides decisions
- α **Ethical** standards govern behaviour
- α Actions produce **constructive** outcomes
- α Trust, **capability**, and confidence grow
- α Improved conditions enable **better** future choices

Each positive action strengthens the system, making the next productive choice easier and more likely. Over time, lives improve, institutions stabilise, and communities flourish. Progress compounds.

Result: Growth, resilience, trust, and sustainable improvement—for individuals and the collective.

The Vicious Cycle

(Where Influential Leadership is absent)

In the absence of leadership, agency is unrecognised or avoided. Decisions are reactive, short-term, or self-serving. Poor choices degrade conditions, which then constrain future options.

How the cycle works:

- α Purpose is **unclear**, ignored or does not exist

- α Behaviour is **ungoverned**, inconsistent or unaccountable
- α Actions produce harmful or unintended **unproductive** outcomes
- α Trust erodes and capability **declines**
- α **Worsening** conditions limit future choices and entrench negativity

Each poor decision weakens the system, making productive choices harder to make. Over time, dysfunction becomes normalised, and decline accelerates.

Result: Stagnation, fragility, mistrust, and cumulative harm.

Summary: The **Essential** Differences

Virtuous Cycle		Vicious Cycle	
Agency is exercised		Agency is neglected	
Choices are intentional		Choices are reactive	
Behaviour is governed		Behaviour is unchecked	
Outcomes strengthen the system		Outcomes degrade the system	
Improvement compounds		Decline compounds	

Influential Leadership is not about control or charisma. It is about **interrupting vicious cycles and initiating virtuous ones**—through disciplined, ethical, and repeated practice.

Where Leadership is practised, **systems improve**. Where it is absent, systems decay.

The cycle you are in is not accidental. It is the consequence of how leadership is—or is not—being exercised.

A Starting Point for 2026 and Always

Before we examine specific issues, either big or small, general or personal, we need a starting point, a credible prism through which we examine matters.

Our prism is where Influential Leadership starts, namely, its **PURPOSE**.

Within the Influential Leadership System, the **Purpose of Leadership** is the founding statement—the starting point for all the other elements.

At **the heart of purpose** is the question: **What is Leadership for?**

This question is not rhetorical—it is practical and has its own architecture that demands clarity about:

- α **The intended impact** of leadership
- α **The lives and systems** it seeks to shape
- α **The ethical boundaries** within which it must operate

It shifts leadership from being a tool of manipulation and personal benefit (*à la* legacy forms of leadership) to an **intentional, governed practice with collective consequences**.

The primary question itself opens **other questions**, such as:

- α Why does leadership **exist**?
- α What conditions is it meant to **improve**?
- α **Who** benefits—and how?
- α What outcomes must it **serve** beyond personal gain or positional power?

The Purpose of Influential Leadership—Unpacking *Where to Start*

The above infographic sets up the formal **purpose statement** for Influential Leadership. If you have completed the Alpha Programme or been consuming *On Leadership*, you will be familiar with it.

It is presented here as the cornerstone of our three-part series on *Where to Start*, and up front in Part I so that you have time to ruminate on it during the week.

Part II picks up from this point to **unpack the purpose into its nine constituent parts** and how they shape our practice of Influential Leadership.

Part III illustrates **how to use PURPOSE** as our Leadership starting point in practical settings.

TANSTAAFL

“TANSTAAFL”—an acronym you might recognise—and if not, you will know where to find its answer. Here is a hint: it has to do with the *cost of lunch*.

Influential Leadership does not spread by accident. It grows only when people choose to practise it—and choose to **pass it on**. If you believe leadership matters, then expanding access to it is not optional; it is part of your activism.

For every *On Leadership* you receive, the call to action is simple and deliberate: **invite one new person to join the movement**, to register for *On Leadership*. One for one. That is the exchange. Influence multiplies only when it is shared.

To keep this effort **focused and accountable**, please forward each week’s *On Leadership* to the person you invite and copy me on the message. This allows me to follow up directly if needs be. If they find no value in it, they are free—as always—to unsubscribe using the link in the footer.

Change for the better does not happen because ideas exist. It happens because **people choose** to carry them forward. Be part of the **virtuous cycle**...



How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment
before starting to improve the world.

Anne Frank. The Diary of a Young Girl



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Regards,
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Influential Leadership Starts Right

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