

A STUDENTLINC LEADERSHIP RESOURCE

# Touching All Four

Living Leadership One Base At A Time



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## Leadership can be confusing.

Like trying to describe love or what the color blue looks like or describing how you find your balance when first riding a bike.

There are plenty of definitions, based on people's perspectives and experiences, that attempt to capture the essence of what leadership is. They say things like: Leaders take the lead. Leaders see the future before others do. Leaders support from the back. My mother would always say to me that leaders eat their vegetables. As you can see, some definitions are notably better than others.

In many ways, it is impossible to capture the essence of what leadership is with a simple definition. It seems too one-dimensional.

That's why I believe there's a need for something more than just a group of words to describe the elusive nature of leadership. I need something that paints a picture and draws an image for me. I also want to use something that is familiar to everybody. What I need is a visual image that gives meaning to what this thing called leadership looks like.

I need an image that even everyday, average people (like me!) can wrap their minds around. I want something general enough to relate to most everyone and specific enough that even one who has been a leader for a long time can find meaning in it.



I want to propose a metaphor to better understand leadership.

A metaphor is any concept, item, or activity that is used to describe something other than what it actually was designed or created for. A metaphor gives somebody the ability to take something that is common and familiar and place it over or beside an idea that is being described.

That's what this ebook is all about. As you've probably already guessed, I've chosen to use the game of baseball as a metaphor for leadership. Now I realize that baseball has been used as a metaphor for a lot of other things. Frankly, baseball could be the ultimate metaphor for life itself. But I'm not quite prepared to tackle all of life, so I'll just stick to leadership.

Over the next few pages, I'll be walking the diamond with you, touching each base and talking about its significance. Each one represents a daily commitment that leaders (or soon-to-be leaders) must consider.

Bob Feller, former pitcher for the Cleveland Indians (1936-1956) and member of the Baseball Hall of Fame, recognized the lessons that his game could teach:

*"Every day is a new opportunity. You can build on yesterday's success or put its failures behind and start over again. That's the way life is, with a new game everyday, and that's the way baseball is."*



Let's begin by brushing up on some baseball facts.

The game of baseball has three bases and one home plate (which is the starting line and the goal for every batter). A batter scores a run when he is able to reach each base safely and make it all the way around the base path to home plate.

Three bases. One home plate. Three places that a player must get to and "touch." One place that all players must start with and hopefully end with.

From this simple understanding of the bases and home plate, I've identified three areas every leader must "touch" throughout the day. In addition, there is a starting and ending place that serves as a home plate that a leader must connect with everyday.

But before I start to break down what each of the bases and home plate mean, I must offer the following humble and heartfelt disclaimer:

The things that I mention here are rather simple ideas, easy to follow and very convicting. These concepts aren't original with me. I've learned them from people a whole lot smarter than I am. You may think other things are more important and that the bases should represent something else. That's okay and I would welcome your input. My hope in writing this is to start a conversation, not end one.



## Naming the Bases

Once we put a name to something, we are able to better identify it and understand its place in the world. When we know a person's name, it is easier to get her attention. Once a doctor diagnoses and names a disease, you have a better idea of how to treat it. This is why I believe it's important to name the bases. Some leaders run the bases without ever knowing why they're running or what they're running toward.

When I name the bases, it helps me know what to do once I've been chosen, inspired, or simply desire to lead. Here's what I've named them:

- › Home Plate: Compass
- › First Base: Character
- › Second Base: Collaboration
- › Third Base: Capability
- › Home Plate: Compass (remember...we start and end with home plate)

You might have noticed that all of the names begin with the same letter. That's to help me remember. When I learn something important, I create a way to remember it. If I can recall that the words all begin with the letter "C" than I've got a better chance of remembering the rest of the letters. So let's step up to the plate and take a look at the first "C" word .



## Home Plate: Compass

Home plate is both the beginning and the end of the base path. When a batter steps into the batter's box, he starts the process of making it back around to this spot. Home plate is a visual reminder that this is where the batter wants to end up.

Home plate is a lot like a compass. A compass is an instrument that shows us direction by simply remembering which way north is. If you know where north is, you can easily figure out south, east, and west. When a leader knows where home plate is, then it helps her know where all of the other bases are.

A compass is important for leaders to look at because it answers the question: Where am I headed? Once a leader can answer that question, she'll be better prepared to answer the question her followers are asking: Where is this leader taking me?

That's why it's crucial for leaders to start each day, each project, each relationship with a compass. Not the physical kind that you hold in your hand, but one that a leader has on the inside that points her in the right direction. It is the thing that will guide a leader around every one of the bases.



Where should the leader's internal compass point? Right back towards home. Just like the home plate in baseball, home is the place where each leader envisions success. Home is the place that is most meaningful when a leader has touched every one of the other bases in order to get there. Home is more than just personal achievement, it is how one relates and interacts in the world around her.

Home becomes the grand idea that one strives for. It is the focus of every effort, every relationship, every accomplishment.

Do you understand what this concept of home looks like?

It has been called other things as well. Some have labeled it morality, ethics, values, mission, priorities, purpose, significance, etc. It is a kind of life mission for every leader.

People can sense when leaders have an internal compass that guides them versus leaders who are swayed by the pull of popular opinion. An internal compass helps a leader know when to say "yes," and when to say, "no."

Every good leader gets up each day and stares at the face in the mirror, making sure she is headed in the right direction. Without a compass, most leaders are in danger of walking their followers right off a cliff.



A powerful example is Sir Ernest Shackleton, who has been called “the greatest leader ever” because of his unique guidance that saved the lives of his twenty-seven crew members. Stranded in the Antarctic for almost two years (1914-1916), Shackleton proved that he led from a vital and well-defined internal compass.

Throughout the growing crisis, with the possibility of death and tragedy looming over the crew each day, Shackleton's compass was always pointed in the right direction. It was the thing that ultimately got them home safely.

In one journal entry, Shackleton wrote about what he felt was necessary for the crew as their plight worsened. He realized they would have to walk nearly 1000 miles to safety:

*“The task (getting home) was likely to be long and strenuous, and an ordered mind and a clear program were essential if we were to come through without loss of life.”\**

Shackleton's extraordinary optimism became the lifeline of his crew. With each passing day, he “stepped up to the plate” and determined the direction of his life and the lives of his comrades who followed his leadership.

Direction is vital to a leader’s success; to the team’s success. As in baseball, leaders must know where they're going in order to make it safely home.



## First Base: Character

*"Life is built on character, but character is built on decisions. The decisions you make, small or great, do to your life what the sculptor's chisel does to the block of marble. You are shaping your life by your thoughts, attitudes, and actions..."*

-Warren Wiersbe

Once a leader has stepped up to the plate and is clear about the direction he is headed, then it's time to move toward first base (put on your arm floaties kids because the next statement is taking us to the deep end).

First base is called first base because it is the base we must run to first! Pretty profound, huh?

First base reminds the leader that he cannot lead others until he first leads himself. Character is an inside job (closely tied to the compass, yet distinct because it doesn't reveal where a person is going as much as it shows the kind of person he is).

This is the base where a leader deals internally with such things as integrity, honesty, ethics, fairness, disposition, ego and justice. These character issues will come to the surface and reveal a person's true self in times of crisis and tension.



Character is formed through the day-to-day decisions, choices and actions of a leader. First base is the first true test of leadership. It is here the leaders asks, "Can I adequately lead myself?" Everything else a leader does flows out of and is flavored by the answer to that question.

If your compass tells you where you are going, then your character tells you and those around you who you really are at this stage of the journey.

Without getting too far ahead of myself, what I am proposing, no, insisting upon is that a leader must "touch" all of the bases each day while keeping his eyes on home plate. In addition, one cannot be effective in touching the rest of the bases until one has touched the "character" base first. The bases are in the order they're in - called what they're called - for a reason.

There are no easy shortcuts to effective leadership. It is an intentional process that requires people of good character.

A person with good character doesn't necessarily mean that they'll be a good leader. But a good leader must definitely be a person with good character.



Too many scandals have erupted. Too many leaders have fallen. Too many people have been left stranded in the vacuum of broken leaders.

The reason?

Leaders who failed to touch first base every day. Leaders who thought they could take a shortcut "just this once," and ended up taking an entire company down with them. Leaders who forgot that it's impossible to be an effective leader of others without first leading themselves.

In a word, character.

One example of a company bouncing back from a corporate, character meltdown at the top is Tyco. When Tyco's CEO was removed because of criminal actions, the company quickly looked to re-establish the ethical core of its leadership and its organization.

Tyco hired Eric Pillmore for the newly created position of Vice President of Corporate Governance. Through the following months, Eric worked with leaders around the company to create Tyco's Guide to Ethical Conduct.

Tyco learned the hard way that who you are will speak more loudly than what you say. People are listening. Your followers are watching. The kind of life you live will make more of an impact than a speech at a stockholder's meeting.



## Second Base: Collaboration

Leaders don't lead tasks. Leaders lead people.

When a leader arrives at second base, she takes the time necessary to invest in relationships; to invest in people. The very reason that there are leaders is because people are willing to follow them. If you are a leader and you take away all your followers, well, you don't have to keep reading this.

Second base reminds leaders that more can be accomplished with others than without them.

The Ecclesiastes writer says that, "*Two are better than one and a cord of three strands is not easily broken.*" People are a leader's greatest asset. But relationship-building, vision-casting, equipping and developing don't just happen on their own.

Once a leader has spent time reading the compass and done what is necessary to lead herself, the leader must run to second base. The leader must engage and interact and relate with people.

At the core of any relationship is trust. People follow leaders because they trust them. In order to maintain that trust, leaders must remain trustworthy (see first base). But the reverse is true as well, leaders must be able to trust their followers.



Once a relationship is built where there is a sense of mutual trust, then the leader and follower can invest their energies and time in helping their organization move in the right direction. And it begins with leaders empowering their followers with the resources necessary to perform at their highest level.

Looking at another example from the life of Sir Ernest Shackleton, former United States Secretary of Defense, Richard Danzig, had this to say about Shackleton's leadership:

*"The values of leadership he provides are eternal. They're derived from the nature of human character and involve making bold ventures and bringing out the best in human beings."\**

A good leader will take the time to understand what brings out the best in those that she works with. She will spend her energies encouraging, listening, praising, and modeling excellence for them.

That's what makes second base such an important base. Leaders can get so focused on the task at hand. Leaders can become self-absorbed with their work. They can forget that reaching home isn't as much fun when you arrive there by yourself.

A good leader must be a "people" person. Good leaders care about people and collaborate with people.



If a leader doesn't care about people, then she is merely using and manipulating her followers for her own advantage. Have you ever been around people who are in charge but you know that they don't like anyone that they're working with? You probably have. And if the truth got out, nobody probably liked working with them either.

A negative side effect of not caring about people is that it causes a leader to operate out of a very narrow perspective. The leader's sense of reality won't mesh with others because the leader hasn't taken into account the needs of others.

One more thought on second base: This is the base where a leader can create her greatest legacy. That legacy will be produced in the people she develops and grows into leaders. The greatest success in the world is not very successful if the leader walks away and the thing falls apart.

As a leader, you must spend time each day working on the relationships you have with people. Make the most of opportunities to share your stories, develop trust, create community, and work toward common goals.

If a leader can't develop relationships, then it won't matter how well she does on third base.



## Third Base: Capability

Let's review:

- › "Home" is your compass, which tells you where you're headed.
- › "First" is your character, who you really are on the journey.
- › "Second" is your collaboration, the people you are taking with you.

Welcome to third base - capability. This represents the talents, abilities, and gifts you bring to the table. If character reveals what's going on inside of you, than capability reveals those things that people can see you doing everyday.

Each leader is uniquely equipped with certain skills that he does exceptionally well - better than others. In fact, many leaders are put into leadership positions simply because they performed at a higher level than others. Even though talent and ability doesn't necessarily qualify someone as a leader, it does show that the person has something to offer to people and to the task at hand.

Some leaders are good at public speaking. Some at strategic thinking. Some have tremendous teaching skills. Some are good at finding out the bottom line. Some have a knack for creating opportunity.

Leaders do their best work when they lead from what they're good at.



Once a leader realizes what he is good at, he can delegate his weak areas to others. Leaders must focus on their strengths in order to continue to be the best leader possible.

For instance, I'm very good at public speaking (at least that's what my mom tells me). But I'm not good with finances. I admit it's a weakness in my life. So I thrive on those opportunities where I get to speak publicly and teach and equip people. But I am lost when it comes to managing the finances of our organization.

Let's say that one day, I decide that since I'm the leader, I am now going to start overseeing the financial details for the company because I think that my job as leader is to have my hand in all areas of the organization. What do you think will happen after two days? After two hours?

We'd all be miserable...and probably in debt.

If a leader spends most of his time trying to focus on his weaknesses, then he will dumb down the success of the team.

I have discovered that if I spend most of my time as a leader attempting to grow in the area of my weaknesses, at best I'll probably become average. At worst, I'll miss my opportunity to be great in my strengths. And so will the members of my team.



In baseball, one of the key positions on the field is the pitcher.

Most pitchers in Major League baseball don't have outstanding batting averages. That's because their strengths lie in the area of pitching. It's what they're good at. It's what they've focused on and developed. They weren't hired to hit, they were hired to pitch.

If the manager of a team decided that it would be good to have pitchers with better batting averages and made them spend more time in the cage, what do you think would happen?

More than likely, the team would end up with mediocre batting and mediocre pitching.

Because if a manager made a pitcher spend more time trying to improve his hitting (his weakness) instead of working on his pitching (his strength), then, over time, the pitching wouldn't be very good.

A leader who focuses on the few things that he does well, and delegates those things that are a weakness, will discover that he is more effective, more energized, and better able to lead people toward home.



## Home Plate: Compass

Once you make it back to home, you've just scored.

Remember, home plate is both a beginning and an end. It is the compass through which we view the other three bases.

Let me try and explain this a little better. When I say that home plate serves as an end, I'm not considering it to be a final destination. If it were, then it might seem like I was advocating for a point where you will finally arrive one day. That's not what I mean.

The reason that the image of a compass is so appealing to me is because it's different than a map. A map tells you where you are and shows you a destination where you'll arrive.

Not so with a compass. A compass may help in figuring out where you are, but it can only point you in the right direction. In that sense, there is no final destination with a compass, only direction.

At the end of each day, I have an opportunity to come home. I can look back over what has taken place and reflect on whether I am still headed in the right direction. Stepping on home plate affirms that I'm on the right track.



Some leaders never take the time to reflect or to look at their compass. They become consumed with the urgent. When a leader starts forgetting about home, all kinds of bad things can happen.

If a leader forgets where she's going, she can really mess up the game.

Leaders may realize that they missed a base or two throughout the day. That happens. There are seasons where we must invest more time in our character, or our collaboration, or our capabilities. But if a leader lacks direction, she will soon forget how important each base is to her leadership.

During reflection, a leader may look back and see that she tried to run the bases in the wrong order. That is easily done in today's society. Too often, people want to see what you can do on third base long before they grow concerned about who you are on first base.

In fact, when a leader loses sight of the compass, her greatest temptation will be to run to third base first.

Running to third base first is funny when you are a kid playing T-ball. But when you become an adult, people don't laugh anymore and the umpire calls you out.



## Getting Out

A baseball player can get out at home plate or in the process of running the bases. Once a player gets out, he has to sit down and wait for his next turn at bat.

In leadership, there are times when we will get out (metaphorically speaking).

Everyone makes mistakes.

Realistically, if you're not making an occasional mistake, then you're probably not trying. One of the redeeming aspects of baseball is realizing that even though you may get out, you still have another chance to try again.

Getting out doesn't mean it's over. Getting out means that this current situation didn't work, let's try again next time - let's get headed back in the right direction. Maybe, just maybe, we can learn some things along the way.

Leaders run the risk of getting out...

- › When they forget to check their compass.
- › When they run to the wrong base first.
- › When they don't touch all the bases.
- › When they run the bases in the wrong order.

It can be dangerous moving from base to base.



Leaders will always face opposition - those people and forces that will try to get them out. A leader is in much less danger of getting out when he is standing safely on a base and doing the kinds of things each base requires. I believe each base is important and crucial to a leader's success.

In fact, take away one or all of the bases and it dramatically changes the way a leader functions. Touching every base guides the leader through what's most important.

What if there were no bases, or if one of the bases was missing? (then our metaphor might change to cricket, but I digress...)

Consider the following scenarios:

If a leader had all the bases but no home plate. Then the leader wouldn't know which direction to go, no idea of where to take people.

If a leader had everything but no first base. Then the leader would do whatever it takes to succeed, even if it meant breaking all the rules and stepping on people to get it.

If a leader had everything but no second base. Then the leader would have a wonderful dream with no one to accomplish it with.

If a leader had everything but no third base. Then that leader would slowly lose credibility because he had nothing to offer to his team.



## Living Out The Metaphor

At some point, the baseball metaphor breaks down. This is true with any metaphor. There are times that leadership may look more like a river, or a flock of geese, or trying to turn the Titanic in order to avoid the iceberg.

The best part of the baseball metaphor for me is that it reminds me that there are certain things required of me everyday. It helps me be a better leader.

Throughout my own leadership journey, I have had the privilege of watching some outstanding leaders round the bases and "touch 'em all." They have modeled the importance that all four of these areas: compass, character, collaboration, and capability play in the life of a leader.

One of the things that I have attempted to do with those who follow me is to help them understand what a leader does, as well as, who a leader is. Both are important. My goal each day is to not only get on base, but to "touch 'em all."

I trust that you will discover that following this basepath is a practical way to get both yourself and your team all the way home!

\* Morrell, Margot and Capparell, Stephanie, Shackleton's Way, Penguin Group, New York. 2001.



It seems to me that the best leaders are students - always learning...always growing. In fact, I've discovered that there isn't much difference between leaders who strive to be the best students and students who are striving to be the best leaders.

There's a lot to learn when one is leading others. My goal is to invite students to become student leaders. Then we learn one step, one level at a time. Student leadership is a learning process that takes confidence to lead from the person you are while striving to become something more.



Tim Milburn currently serves as the Director of Campus Life at Northwest Nazarene University, located in Nampa, Idaho. He develops resources and tools that equip students to become student leaders, both on their campuses and in their communities.

If you've found this ebook helpful, you can feel free to pass it along to others. The only thing you can't do with it is sell it or offer it without proper credit. You can also find other helpful resources designed for student leaders at [timmilburn.com](http://timmilburn.com).