

Work Smart, Be Happy; The Foundation

A New Foundation
for Sustainable Leadership

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for Sustainable Leadership

Michiel A.M. Arens

This book does not teach techniques.
It reorients the inner place from which techniques work.

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1 Introduction

Effortlessness

When Work and Life Move in the Same Direction

Effortlessness is often misunderstood.

It is confused with ease without responsibility, calm without ambition, or detachment from results. In reality, effortlessness has nothing to do with doing less. It has everything to do with **working and living from the right inner place**.

Most exhaustion—at work and at home—does not come from what we do.

It comes from **inner imbalance**.

Effortlessness arises when thinking, feeling, doing, and will are aligned—and when life is lived from **being**, not from having.

Why Effortlessness Requires Inner Balance

Every action you take is preceded by an inner movement.

You think about something.

You feel something about it.

You decide to act—or hesitate.

Your will sets direction.

When these four capacities are aligned, action feels clean and proportionate. When they are not, effort increases.

- Thinking without feeling becomes overanalysis
- Feeling without thinking becomes emotional reactivity
- Doing without will becomes busyness
- Will without balance becomes force

Effortlessness does not mean the absence of effort.
It means **the absence of inner friction**.

Effortlessness at Work: Acting From Being

Imagine starting your workday without a tight chest or racing thoughts.

You open your laptop, coffee in hand, and your task list feels manageable—not because there is less to do, but because you are not trying to *prove* anything through action.

Your thinking is clear.

Your feeling is steady.

Your doing is focused.

Your will is grounded.

There is rhythm instead of urgency.

Meetings become purposeful rather than draining. When issues arise, you address them with calm confidence instead of jumping into firefighting mode. You ask better questions. You delegate more easily because control has been replaced by trust.

You no longer act from the need to *have* results in order to feel okay.

You act from a stable sense of **being**.

And paradoxically, results improve.

The Trap of Having-Based Effort

Work becomes heavy when it is driven by *having*:

- Having to deliver in order to feel competent
- Having to succeed in order to feel safe
- Having to be needed in order to feel valuable

In this mode, doing becomes compulsive. Thinking accelerates. Feeling is suppressed. Will turns rigid.

Effort increases—but effectiveness does not.

Effortlessness emerges when the sequence is reversed:

Being → Doing → Having

You choose who you are being first—clear, present, grounded.

From there, you do what is necessary.

And what you have becomes a natural consequence, not a condition for self-worth.

Effortlessness in Private Life: Restoring Wholeness

Effortlessness does not stop when work ends. Or rather—it should not.

Many people bring work home not physically, but internally. The body is present, but the mind is still solving, anticipating, or replaying.

This happens when thinking and will remain activated, while feeling and presence are neglected.

Effortlessness in private life begins with **rebalancing**.

You consciously end the workday—perhaps with a walk, a breath, or a small ritual that signals completion. The nervous system stands down. Thinking slows. Feeling returns.

You listen fully.

You enjoy small moments again.

You are not managing life—you are inhabiting it.

This is not indulgence.

It is integration.

One Inner State, Two Contexts

Effortlessness is not something you switch on at home and off at work.

It is one inner posture, expressed in different contexts.

When thinking, feeling, doing, and will are aligned at work, they remain aligned at home. When you live from being in one domain, it naturally extends to the other.

The real boundary between work and private life is not time.

It is **inner balance**.

The Signs of Effortlessness

When effortlessness becomes part of how you live and work, certain patterns appear naturally:

- You respond instead of react
- You act from clarity rather than pressure
- You notice imbalance early and correct gently
- You respect your energy as a finite resource
- You trust unfolding rather than forcing outcomes

Your leadership feels quieter—but stronger.

Your relationships feel deeper—but lighter.

Your work feels purposeful—not heavy.

Effortlessness Is Not Passive

Effortlessness is often mistaken for passivity. In reality, it requires a high level of inner responsibility.

It asks you to:

- Notice where effort is driven by fear
- Release the need to earn your right to be okay
- Stop overusing one capacity to compensate for another

Effortlessness is not avoiding action.

It is **choosing action that fits**.

Closing Reflection

Effortlessness is not a destination.

It is a way of moving.

It arises when you live from being instead of chasing having.

When thinking, feeling, doing, and will support each other instead of competing. When energy flows in one direction rather than being pulled apart.

Working smart and being happy are not separate goals.

They are two expressions of inner alignment.

And effortlessness is how that alignment becomes visible—in your work, and in your life.

2 Discovering the Box You Are Living In

Why Every Fundamental Change Starts With Awareness

Every fundamental change in life begins with the same moment: the moment you discover the box you are living in.

Most people never do.

They live their lives inside invisible boundaries, interpreting reality through assumptions they did not consciously choose. They work harder, adapt more, push through obstacles, and wonder why effort never seems to lead to ease. The problem is not lack of capability. The problem is that all effort is applied *inside the same box*.

Your Concept of Reality

You, me—everybody—lives in a box.

This box is not physical. It is mental and emotional. It consists of programs that have been loaded into your consciousness from early childhood until today. Experiences, interpretations, decisions, and conclusions slowly shape how you see yourself, others, and life itself.

Over time, this box becomes your concept of reality.

It determines:

- How you relate to people
- How you work
- What you believe is possible
- What you strive for
- What you tolerate
- What you expect from life

Your relationships, your career, your achievements, and even your struggles all emerge from this framework.

If you are content with your life, the box fits you well—and you are happy.

Unhappiness arises when there is a growing gap between what you want from life and what your box allows you to experience. That gap disrupts your inner flow. You begin to experience friction—both privately and professionally. Small hiccups accumulate. Stress increases. And over time, this stress leads to personal and work-related problems.

The issue is not life itself.

The issue is that life is being lived inside a box that no longer serves you.

Why You Cannot Change What You Cannot See

Most attempts at change fail because they focus on outcomes rather than assumptions. People try to change *what* they do without questioning *from where* they are doing it.

As long as the box remains invisible, every change attempt reinforces the same patterns. New strategies are applied with the same mindset. New goals are pursued with the same inner logic. More effort is invested, but the underlying structure remains untouched.

This is why fundamental change always starts with awareness.

Before you can step out of the box, you must first discover its boundaries.

The Story of My Box

I did not discover my box through theory. I discovered it through exhaustion.

At the age of five, my life changed in a way I could not yet understand. My mother introduced my jealous stepfather into our lives. As a consequence, she no longer cuddled me, held me, or let me sit on her lap. As a child, I longed for love. And in that longing, I made a decision—one that would shape my entire life:

If I don't get love naturally, I will get it by doing something for it.

And it worked.

I received love from grandparents, family friends, and others around me. But the program was set: love had to be earned. Effort preceded reward.

Without realising it, I applied this logic to everything:

- Relationships
- Money
- Work
- Success
- Projects
- Customers
- Even family life

My motto became simple: *work hard, get results.*

And I did.

But at forty, I found myself sitting in the garden of my new home, completely exhausted. My marriage was falling apart. After decades of working more than sixty hours a week in my own company, I had been tricked out of my shares. I had no energy left. I was deeply unhappy. If it had not been for my five children, I am not sure whether I would have wanted to continue living.

Discovering the Root

During a six-week period of intense reflection, I began to look beyond circumstances. I asked myself not *what went wrong*, but *what had been consistent throughout my life*.

The answer was confronting.

Everything traced back to that simple childhood decision:

“To get what I want, I have to work hard for it.”

My life followed the same pattern again and again:

wanting → doing → being

I wanted something.

I worked relentlessly for it.

I arrived somewhere I often did not want to be.

In my fantasies, life looked effortless.
In reality, it was the opposite.

The Shift That Changed Everything

During this period, I read extensively, including **Think and Grow Rich**. Hill explained that success begins with the choice of who you want to *be*, not with what you want to *have*.

At first, I thought this was about money. Later, I discovered that Hill himself clarified—shortly before his death—that “rich” was never meant to be financial only. It included the spiritual, emotional, and relational dimensions of life.

This insight changed everything.

I asked myself a different question:

What happens if I start with choosing who and what I want to BE?

At five, I had unconsciously chosen a way of being: *someone who must earn everything through effort*. Now, decades later, I realised I still had the power to choose.

From HAVING–DOING–BEING to BEING–DOING–HAVING

My life had been driven by wanting to have—results, security, love, success. Doing followed naturally. Being was always postponed.

But I learned something essential:

When the focus is on *wanting*, you lose yourself.

And when you lose yourself, happiness always stays out of reach.

So I made a new decision.

I chose to let **being** lead.

From that point on:

- I chose who and how I wanted to be
- Based on that choice, I did what was necessary
- And what I had became a natural consequence

Being → Doing → Having

Changing the Mindset of the Box

Discovering the box is only the beginning. Change becomes real only when the mindset inside the box changes.

For me, this started with visualisation. I visualised effortlessness in every aspect of my life. I created a mood board and confronted myself with it every morning and every evening—day after day, week after week, month after month, for years.

During that process, a phrase emerged that captured everything I was working toward:

Work Smart, Be Happy

Not working less—but working without inner struggle.

Not achieving less—but achieving without losing myself.

This shift alone gave me the energy to write a book, publish it, sell it, and start a new company. It launched a two-decade search for excellence—not driven by pressure, but by alignment.

The Power to Create Your Reality

As a human being, you have the power to *be*.

You have the power to create your own reality.

You have the power to choose who you will be in that reality.

What many people do not realise is this:

Once you truly choose, life responds.

Opportunities, people, and circumstances align—not magically, but naturally—because your actions now emerge from clarity instead of compensation.

This is what I want to share with you.

Not theory.

Not shortcuts.

But lived experience—without the pitfalls.

So that you, too, can discover your box.

Change the mindset that sustains it.

And step into a life where working smart and being happy are no longer opposites—but expressions of the same inner alignment.

This is the foundation.

3 Working Smart Starts Inside: The Inner Balance

The Four Capacities Every Leader Uses (Often Unconsciously)

Whether you are leading projects, teams, or an entire organisation, your effectiveness depends on four inner capacities. Most leaders use them every day—often without realising how imbalanced they may have become.

Thinking – IQ (Intelligence Quotient)

Thinking forms the backbone of leadership. Strategy, planning, prioritisation, risk assessment, and anticipating interdependencies all rely on cognitive clarity. When thinking is balanced, leaders can see patterns, make sound decisions, and maintain perspective across competing demands.

Under sustained pressure, however, thinking easily becomes overloaded. Instead of creating clarity, the mind becomes reactive and fragmented. Attention jumps from issue to issue, and long-term direction is replaced by short-term firefighting. Decisions may be rushed in an attempt to regain control—or endlessly postponed due to mental fatigue.

When thinking dominates without balance, clarity diminishes rather than increases. Balanced thinking is not about analysing more; it is about knowing when analysis serves the situation and when it no longer does.

Feeling – EQ (Emotional Quotient)

Despite the emphasis on strategy, plans, and processes, leadership is fundamentally people work. Emotions such as frustration, resistance, motivation, fear, and uncertainty are present in every organisation—whether they are acknowledged or not.

When emotional awareness is ignored, tensions within teams and leadership groups often escalate unnoticed. Communication becomes transactional, and unspoken dynamics begin to undermine trust and collaboration.

At the same time, leaders frequently absorb emotional pressure without processing it, carrying it from meeting to meeting and from work into personal life.

Many leaders suppress emotions in the name of professionalism. Yet unprocessed emotions do not disappear. They surface indirectly as irritability, withdrawal, reduced patience, impaired judgment, or eventual burnout. Balanced emotional awareness allows leaders to recognise what is happening in themselves and others without becoming overwhelmed by it. It enables accurate reading of situations while maintaining healthy distance and clarity.

Doing – OQ (Operational Quotient)

Doing is where leadership becomes visible. Execution, communication, decision follow-through, and delivery translate intent into results. Action creates momentum, and without it, even the best strategy stalls.

Under pressure, however, doing can turn into constant busyness. Activity increases, but direction becomes less clear. Leaders may over-function, step too far into detail, or micromanage as a way to reduce anxiety—creating a false sense of control. The focus shifts from effectiveness to motion.

When doing is disconnected from thinking and feeling, leaders risk becoming task drivers rather than impact creators. They are active, but not necessarily effective. Balanced doing is not about doing less; it is about aligning action with clarity and intention. It means choosing the right actions rather than trying to do everything.

Will – Direction, Boundaries, and Inner Authority

Will is the most underestimated leadership capacity. It is the inner force that allows leaders to set boundaries, make clear choices, and hold direction when others pull in competing directions.

Without a developed will, leaders become reactive. They say yes too often, absorb unrealistic expectations, and gradually lose ownership of priorities. Decisions are driven by pressure rather than choice, urgency rather than intention.

A conscious will does not express itself as force or rigidity. Instead, it shows up as inner authority—the ability to decide what is possible, what is not, and what comes first. This capacity creates stability, not only for the leader, but for teams, stakeholders, and the wider organisation.

Why Balance Is Essential for Leaders

Most leaders are trained to strengthen thinking and doing. Feeling and will, however, are rarely developed with the same intention. Over time, this imbalance creates a familiar pattern: high competence paired with low energy, constant responsibility paired with limited control, and professional success accompanied by personal exhaustion.

Inner balance changes this dynamic. When all four capacities are aligned, leaders are better able to remain calm when conditions shift, communicate clearly under pressure, and lead without burning out. Stress is reduced not by lowering standards, but by changing the inner position from which work is done.

Balance is not about slowing down. It is about working from the right place inside—so that delivery no longer comes at the cost of well-being.

Leadership will always involve complexity, pressure, and uncertainty. What changes is not the work itself, but the place inside from which it is done. When thinking, feeling, doing, and will are brought into balance, clarity replaces urgency and direction replaces strain. Working smart no longer means pushing harder—it means standing more firmly within yourself. From that inner steadiness, sustainable results naturally follow.