

EVOLVING DIGITAL LEADERSHIP

HOW TO BE A DIGITAL LEADER IN
TOMORROW'S DISRUPTIVE WORLD

James Brett

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Evolving Digital Leadership: How to Be a Digital Leader in Tomorrow's Disruptive World

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Printed on acid-free paper

In memory of my grandfather

Walter (Wally) Hinchliffe

I miss you every day

Contents

About the Author	vii
Foreword	ix
Acknowledgments	xi
Part I: Digital Leadership	1
Chapter 1: Start Here	3
Chapter 2: TL;DR: Too Long; Didn't Read	9
Chapter 3: Becoming a Digital Leader	31
Chapter 4: Career Success Pyramid	53
Chapter 5: The Evolution of Digital Leadership	63
Chapter 6: Unnatural Selection: Evolving Faster Than the Pace of Change	75
Part II: Awareness	91
Chapter 7: Humans as a Full Stack	93
Chapter 8: Experts and Achievers	101
Chapter 9: Preferences and Patterns	121
Chapter 10: Personality Types	139
Part III: Intention	161
Chapter 11: Intention: The Secret to Success	163
Chapter 12: Understanding What's Important	179
Chapter 13: Successful Intentions	199
Part IV: Attention	215
Chapter 14: Attention: Self	219
Chapter 15: Attention: Team	235
Chapter 16: Attention: Stakeholders	253

Part V: Reflection 269
Chapter 17: Reflection 273
Chapter 18: Reflection Methods 287
Chapter 19: Reflecting Together 305

Chapter 20: Ignite. 311
Chapter 21: It's Not Cheating 319

Index 321

About the Author



James Brett describes himself as a digital leader who is passionate about developing people and organizations to create a positive future for humanity.

Ultimately, he is a geek at heart. At the age of 11, he learned to code, and at 18, he had replaced the engine in his first car. James's curiosity about how things work and his knack for fixing things continued into his adult work life.

James studied micro-electronics and computing at university, spent the next 10 years in software development, and more recently, has focused over 10 years on leadership and coaching.

As a technology expert, James leads strategic thinking from the board level through to team implementations, covering digital strategy, organizational transformation, and product development. He holds a global perspective on digital, having lived in the United States, UK, China, and Australia, and this allows him to understand the complex cultural and market dynamics that impact technology and product delivery across continents.

He is well-respected in the tech industry and has presented at several Agile/digital conferences globally. As the ThoughtWorks Transformation Practice Lead, James had the privilege of working alongside his mentor, Agile Thought Leader Jim Highsmith, on the global rollout of Adaptive Leadership. This started James down a path of "finding a better way" for teams and organizations. James is a certified Leadership Agility Coach, Integrative Enneagram Coach, NLP Master Practitioner, and Holacracy Practitioner. He leverages this unique combination of psychology and digital skills to grow high-performance teams, leaders, and organizations.

Ultimately, James wants to leave the world a better place for his children and our future generations, so it's no surprise that he donates his time to charities and not-for-profit organizations such as Redkite and Burn Bright.

Outside of the office, you'll find James enjoying time with his family, capturing photos at <http://jamesbrett.4ormat.com/>, building and flying drones, or in his workshop constructing cubby houses.

James can be reached by email at: james@evolvingdigitalleadership.com

Foreword

We have all heard the mantra multiple times and in multiple ways. The world is changing—fast. Technology is driving change—even faster. People need to adapt to these changes—rapidly. People need to adapt again and again—don’t slow down yet. In order to adapt to our rapidly changing, technology-driven digital businesses, we need a new leadership culture, leaders with new skills, new behaviors, new talents, new outlooks, and new ideas. The core question for many organizations is “how do we grow the kinds of leaders we need in the future?”. For many individuals, the question is “how do I transform myself from a technical specialist to a technical leader?”.

Evolving Digital Leadership, by my colleague and friend James Brett, seeks to answer these questions by drawing on years of personal experience and extensive interviews with leaders from organizations, large and small. Growing yourself into a leader and helping others to grow into leaders is more complex these days. But it isn’t an either/or situation, it’s a both/and situation. Technical experts need to be leaders at times. Business leaders need to be technically competent at times (actually at most times). As technology, specifically digital technology, increasingly moves from a business support role to being an integral part of your businesses products and services, we need a better model for growing leaders—one that James provides.

Is there anyone who thinks the pace of technology-driven change will lessen? Where will we be in 5 years, or in 10? If your crystal ball is working well, let the rest of us know. Otherwise we are probably safe in saying that advances in technology will continue at a fever pace; those technologies will lead to more complexity; and the importance of integrating technologies and business practices will increase. We need a roadmap to address these issues.

Why Unnatural Selection? Is this just a play on words or do the ideas behind *natural selection*, the biology of survival of the fittest, provide insight into our leadership development dilemma? A rebel group of biologists contend that even billions of years is not enough time to generate the diversity of life we see on our earth. They contend that there is another force at work they call *arrival of the fittest*. While survival forces create small increments of change that eventually add up to big changes, arrival forces, grounded in collaboration and cooperation, create big jumps in adaptability. Today’s pace of change

demands more than survival and slow adaptations to change. Today we need arrival of the fittest driving Unnatural Selection as a way to adapt to continuous change. We need to grow a cadre of unnatural, survival-skilled leaders.

So, how do we do this?

James defines the Unnatural Selection framework, at the heart of which is the evolution helix.

The evolution helix is a four-step process designed to evolve a digital leader's awareness in order to constantly create and respond to change. The four steps of the evolution helix are Awareness, Intention, Attention, and Reflection. These may sound like traditional skills, but in this book they go beyond tradition. For example, tomorrow's leaders need to be as aware of what they are not measuring as what they are. Most measurements reflect what we considered to be successful *yesterday*. Digital leaders need to answer the question, "What are we not measuring today that we need to measure tomorrow?"

For example, over the past 5-10 years one of the major transitions for technology (and business) leaders has been to move from a cost-driven to a value-driven view of technology. Measurement systems tend to get locked in. When to unlock and move on to new measures of success is one way in which digital leaders need to be aware.

In his Unnatural Selection framework, James leverages his experience in coaching and psychology to help us understand the nuances of how and why people do what they do. Building on this advanced psychology, James presents several digital specific models that help us understand and "do" digital leadership in a more effective way.

The Digital Situational Leadership model is one such tool that identifies two axes of leadership that are essential to success: Tactical/Strategic and Delivery/Culture. In the quadrants formed by these axes, he then describes four modes of leadership—Get Stuff Done, Friend of the Team, Utopian, and Futurist. He goes on to say, "All four modes are essential to success, and all are dangerous if we spend too much time locked in one. Digital Situational Leadership is a leader's ability to understand the current situation and maintain their agility to move around the four modes as required."

In closing, I'll just say that the Unnatural Selection framework provides a path to answering the two key questions from the first paragraph: "How do we grow the leaders we need now and in the future?" and "How do I transform myself from a technical specialist to a technical leader?" Adaptability is key to surviving and thriving in tomorrow's world. You only achieve adaptability by growing adaptive leaders. *Evolving Digital Leadership* provides a path to do just this.

Jim Highsmith
Lafayette, Colorado
June 2017

Acknowledgments

I've always loved fast cars and motorsport. As a boy, I would spend Sunday afternoons watching Formula One Grand Prix on TV. I loved the speed and excitement of the racing as I cheered for my favorite British drivers. Back then, I thought winning races was all down to the superhuman skill of the drivers and about who could drive faster and more consistently than anyone else. Only over time did I fully comprehend the relatively small role the driver plays in getting the car over the finish line first, race after race, season after season.

Until I wrote this book, I viewed authors the same way. Now I realize that being an author is much like being a racing car driver—there is a huge team of people that supports and contributes to producing a great book. I am truly grateful to all those on my team who made this dream possible. This book is as much theirs as it is mine.

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¹<http://www.inspirationalbookwritersretreat.com.au/>

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²<https://www.behance.net/galaxiemia>