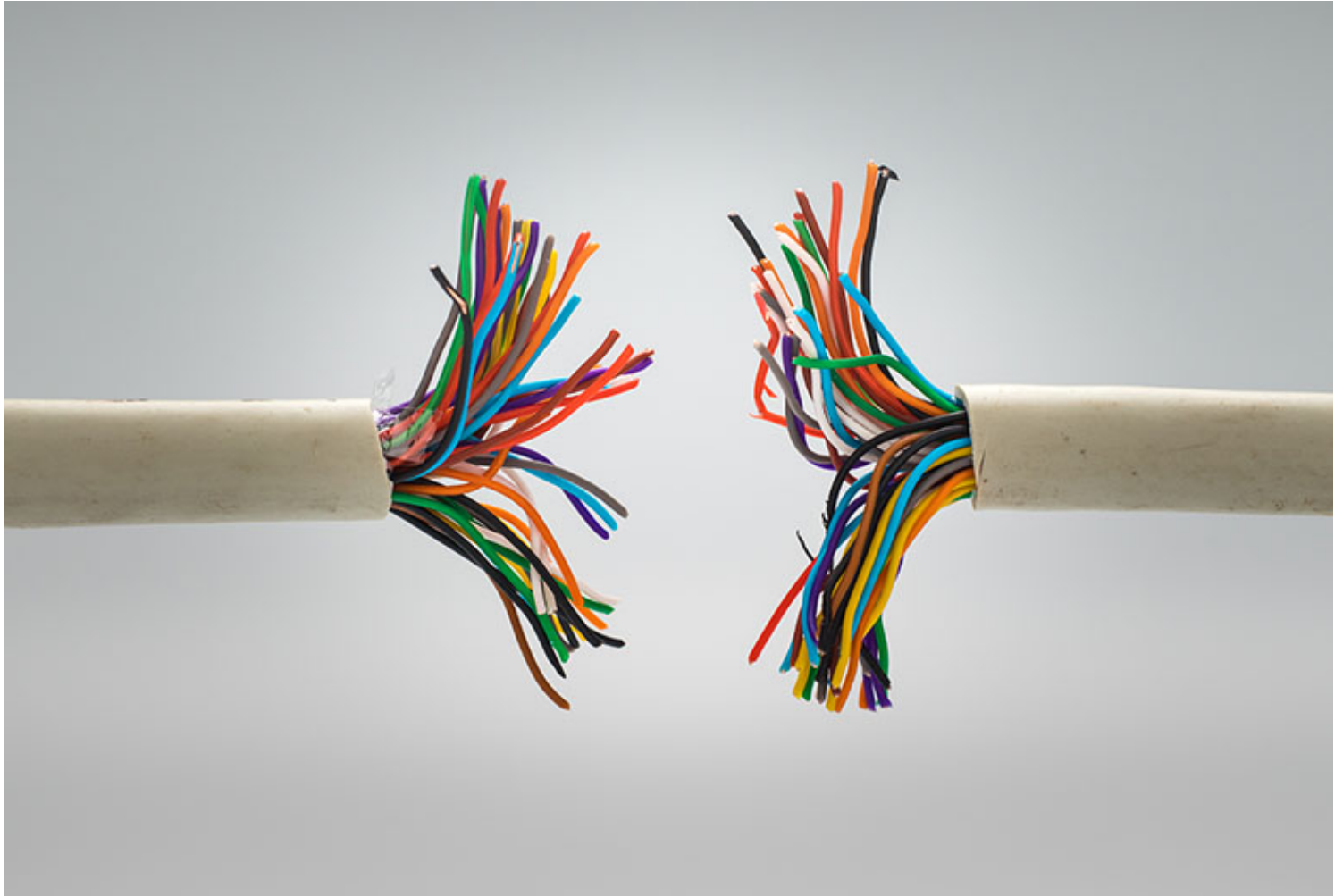


MIND THE GAP BETWEEN WHAT YOU BELIEVE AND HOW YOU LEAD

by Glenn Williams



I have a couple of questions for you. Can you, as a leader, articulate your core beliefs and values? And do you lead others in a way that aligns with them – your value code?

If you lead people in any capacity, it's important (and incredibly helpful) you know your value code and let it inform and guide your decisions and the tone you set in leadership.

I've worked with leaders around the world, and one of the key issues they face is what I call the *misalignment phenomenon*. Though they might prescribe to a set of values, these same values are sometimes quickly discarded if they get in the way of the result they are chasing.

"Misalignment is the disconnect between what you want and what you have, between knowing what's important to you and living a life that contradicts it."

Let's break it down. The misalignment phenomenon is the disconnect between what you believe and what you do. It's the space between what you value and what you will sacrifice to get it and between the story you're living and the one you envisioned.

The most common issue at the C-Suite leadership level is a lack of values alignment. I meet with men and women who've 'made it' by all accounts but are plagued with regrets. They may have all the outward appearance and trappings of 'success', but it often comes at a high price, and by sacrificing some of the things they now identify as more important.

The difficulty is that it's never about the one big decision that obviously goes against what you hold dear. It's the seemingly small, daily choices that lead you to a place you never intended to go.

Mind the gap.

I grew up in Melbourne, Australia and started my working life in the city. I took the train to work every day, and every morning, at every station, I heard the same thing; "Mind the gap." It's the same in most countries I've visited. The "gap" is that space between the train and the platform you have to step across as you disembark. It's not that the gap is a void capable of swallowing you whole, but it is a potential tripping hazard.

That's what misalignment is: *a possible tripping opportunity*. And it's easily done. I've noticed it even more so with the relatively recent FOMO phenomenon. The fear of missing out has seriously gripped younger generations, but none of us is immune to its effects.

Do any of these resonate?

- “If I don’t show a willingness to work longer hours, I might miss out on a promotion.”
- “If I don’t take this job that offers more pay, I may not get another chance to build financial security.”
- “If I tell the whole story of the why the sales figures aren’t as high as they should be, I might lose my job or be demoted.”
- “I know that taking on these additional responsibilities will be challenging for my family, but it’s a great opportunity that may not come around again.”

It’s not that any of these things are inherently bad. Nor is it that we’re doing anything technically wrong, but they represent a willingness to consider compromising what’s important to us in life and business.

So, do you know what’s important—truly important—to you? And I’m not talking about those attributes we think everyone wants to hear, like integrity, honesty, courage, vision and so on. I mean the ones in your DNA, those that define you.

There’s a reason you do what you do and, equally, why you don’t do certain things. There are deeply held values behind your choice to not talk behind someone’s back when others undermine them. And there’s a reason you present accurate reports to the Board, shareholders, and investors when there’s significant pressure to fudge the projected cash flow.



A house divided will fall.

If leaders violate their core values as they lead, their misalignment will have flow-on effects—personally and corporately. There's something that happens when words and actions don't line up; it creates a divided house, and as we know, a house divided will fall.

The good news is that misalignment isn't fatal. If you've found yourself making decisions that violate your core values and beliefs, you don't have to stay in that place. It's not too late to turn things around, but it does require a change in direction and a willingness to be vulnerable.

It's not about "having it all." We don't always get what we want. The truth is that life throws curve balls, and it's not always fair. That's not what I'm talking about. What I'm talking about is staying true to your

beliefs and not compromising your values to mitigate temporary pain or make short-term gains.

The ends don't justify the means if those means take you into compromise. Don't let the fear of missing out take you down a path that violates your value code.

Your reputation precedes you.

Like it or not, you have a reputation. What kind of reputation you have is ultimately up to you, and if you don't take the time to cultivate your reputation intentionally, what you end up with may not be what you want.

*"And as it turns out, your reputation is everything in both business and life. You can spend your whole life building a good reputation and lose it in a minute if you don't know what you believe and 'mind the gap'."*²

If your reputation isn't grounded in the deeply held beliefs and values that are needed to support it, it will be that much more challenging to live by them when pressure is applied.

What happens when you're squeezed?

Have you noticed that some people remain true to their values, even under intense pressure, while others become almost unrecognizable? We'd all like to think we know how we'll respond in a crisis and that our espoused values, reactions and actions under pressure will align. But suppose we haven't taken the time to identify, articulate, and incorporate those values into our daily lives. In that case, we set ourselves (and others) up for a potentially nasty surprise when we're inevitably tested in the crucible of life and business.

In my book, *[When Leaders Are Lost](#)*, I document the spectacular fall from grace of Volkswagen and its CEO, Martin Winterkorn.

"When Martin Winterkorn took over as Volkswagen's CEO in 2007, he wanted VW to become the world's largest automaker, selling over 10 million cars a year, relieving Toyota of its pole position. The company hoped this strategy would also help Germany mitigate the fallout from the effects of the Global Financial Crisis in 2008.

Increasing sales in the U.S. market meant pressure to create powerful, fuel-efficient diesel cars whose emissions would pass America's stringent pollution regulations.

To achieve this, VW engineers installed a defeat device in cars exported to the U.S. In lab testing, the

vehicles met U.S. emission standards. However, on the road, where the defeat device automatically turned off, testing sometimes showed emissions 35 times higher than allowed.

The discovery of the defeat devices happened in 2014, and the fallout was almost instantaneous. Regulators worldwide opened investigations, and VW halted sales of its 2015 models. Fourteen specific car makes and models were equipped with this duping software, with almost 11 million customers affected.

Winterkorn resigned, and senior managers were suspended or put on leave as the VW stock price plummeted. Experts say the presence of three factors contributed to the fateful decision made by the VW engineers – pressure, opportunity, and rationalization. Former employees declared that subordinates were afraid to admit failure or contradict superiors. Winterkorn was known for publicly dressing down subordinates and occasionally banging car parts on tables to emphasize a point.

His legacy cost the company US\$63 billion and led to the indictment of six senior executives in the U.S. The cavalier 'win at all costs' attitude of its leaders simply created a culture of fear and compromise that was not sustainable.”³

What happens when you're squeezed? Are your values so deeply ingrained that in the moment, you respond from them rather than react to the situation? Where's your 'line in the sand', and the circumstances under which you would cross that line?

The trust factor.

Trust is earned. It happens when people know what you stand for because it comes out in your actions, in the way you treat others, and in your consistent responses. Predictability may sound boring and even vaguely negative, but it's actually a great indicator of your alignment with your core values and a vital ingredient in building trust, not just at work but in all of your key relationships.

If people in your world, including at work, can articulate in broad brushstrokes how you will respond when push comes to shove, you've demonstrated consistency and predictability. If your responses are generally healthy and maintain relationships, the trust quotient will increase.

If, on the other hand, people aren't sure how you'll respond in any given situation, trust will likely be in short supply. Equally, if you articulate certain values but your behaviour doesn't align, trust will plummet.

What's your value code?

When I founded LCP Global in 2010, I aligned our business values with the values that were important to

me. This was extremely important for the direction of the company. I wanted the company values to resonate with potential clients as well as consultants and coaches who would work with us. I identified and articulated five fundamental values that are integral to me as a person and that I want to be at the forefront of my business.



Alignment

This comes from a core belief that people can achieve better outcomes, be more fulfilled, and have better quality relationships at work and outside of work when their professional and personal goals are not in conflict.



Reflection

I believe in the power of reflection and how it can help leaders create a new trajectory by leveraging their leadership stories.



Focused Momentum

We're committed to giving leaders the tools to achieve momentum and measurable results in as little as 90 days. There is an intentionality and commitment to focused momentum.



Courage

Courage is a vital ingredient in the ability to stay the course, change, and to lead well while pursuing your goals.



Generosity

Generosity is at the core of the mission. We invest liberally into the lives of others so that they can live a life of generosity toward others.



Overcoming misalignment and understanding what you value

Ultimately, we're far less likely to compromise our values as leaders if they're lived out consistently outside work. I've discovered that consistency in living my core values also builds resilience and makes me vastly more trustworthy for my family, friends, colleagues, and peers.

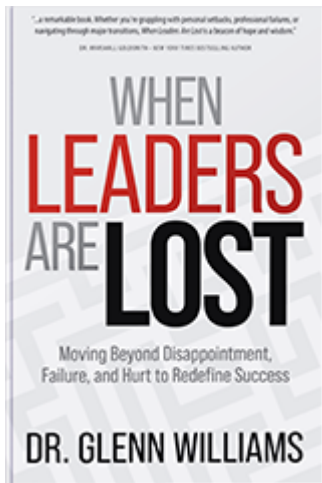
Misalignment can be rectified. We all make mistakes, and we all have areas in our lives that need adjustment. I wish I'd learned earlier in life how to mind the gap, mitigating the risk of crossing the line of compromise, but it's never too late.

If you're struggling to identify your core values, pick five people who know you best. Ask them what words and values they would use to describe you. If you're uncomfortable doing that, write down the words and values you think they'd used and see how they align with their reflections when you ask them.

Accountability matters

Change takes courage and time, and it doesn't happen in a vacuum. I strongly recommend that you connect with a couple of trusted people who can help keep you accountable and help you live and lead in alignment with those values that are core to you.

Knowing what you value and having a few trusted people in your corner goes a long way to helping you avoid the line of compromise and the dangerous phenomenon of misalignment—even if you have to affirm a new set of values to guide you into a new season.



[Learn More](#)

¹ Dr Glenn Williams, When Leaders Are Lost, p122.

² Dr Glenn Williams, When Leaders Are Lost, p125.

³ Lynch, Luann J. Almand R. Coleman et al., "The Volkswagen Emissions Scandal". University of Virginia Darden School Foundation, Charlottesville, VA., 2016. This was written as a basis for class discussion; Gaim, Medhanie, Stewart Clegg, Miguel Pina e Cunha, "Managing Impressions Rather Than Emissions: Volkswagen and the false mastery of paradox", Organization Studies, Volume 42, Issue 6, 2021, p. 949-970, <https://doi-org.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/0170840619891199>