

## PREFACE

*The iconic founder of numerous businesses under the brand name Virgin, Sir Richard Branson is not only one of the richest and most entrepreneurial men in the United Kingdom, he also appears to be one of the most balanced and playful. The eldest of four, Branson is dyslexic, and as a result he struggled academically. However, he refused to let that disability limit him. From a very young age, he focused instead on building his businesses. Leveraging his ability to connect with other people, his first venture took the form of a student magazine. He was just 16 years old.*

*Sir Richard is perhaps most famous for his airline. In his autobiography, he wrote about his decision to start that venture:*

*“My interest in life comes from setting myself huge, apparently unachievable challenges and trying to rise above them . . . from the perspective of wanting to live life to the fullest, I felt that I had to attempt it.”*

*When his grandmother was 99, she wrote to Richard saying that the last decade of her life had been the best. She inspired him with the powerful message, “You’ve got one go in life, so make the most of it.” Says Sir Richard, “I have done my best to live up to her wish.” He also credits his mother with shaping his thinking: “My mother was determined to make us independent.”*

*He writes in his book Losing My Virginity, “When I was four, she stopped the car a few miles from our house and made me find my own way home across the fields.”<sup>1</sup>*

*Often seen as a transformational leader, Sir Richard chooses to hire motivated people, then he inspires energy around a goal and expects people to achieve it. He believes in helping people achieve things they didn’t know they were capable of and enjoys being a catalyst to the success of others. He believes that you learn by testing theories and making mistakes. At the same time, he is known for treating employees as an extended family. His blog on the Virgin homepage exemplifies his very personal, warm and engaging style.*

*As well as running his business empire, Sir Richard commits energy to Virgin Unite, a not-for-profit foundation which focuses on entrepreneurial approaches to social and environmental issues. One funding recipient, Caroline Hart, left a comment on the Virgin website explaining what his help meant to her cause: “Sir Richard Branson is the real deal and I can say that from personal experience. Richard got behind a fundraising idea that I had and because of his help we were able to rebuild a tsunami-hit school in India. He and his business are what we need more of if the world is to get back on its feet.”*

*Screw Business as Usual, Sir Richard’s latest book, enrolls others in his dream, which his website describes as turning “capitalism upside down—to shift our values, to switch from a just profit focus to caring for people, communities and the planet.” He explains: “Over the last few decades as I’ve started up one exciting business after another, I thought that life and work could not get any better. In writing this book, I’ve realized that we’ve really been on a practice run, getting ready for the greatest challenge and opportunity of our lifetime. We’ve got a shot at really pulling together to turn upside down*

*the way we approach the challenges we are facing in the world and look at them in a brand new entrepreneurial way. Never has there been a more exciting time for all of us to explore this great next frontier where the boundaries between work and purpose are merging into one, where doing good really is good for business.”<sup>2</sup>*

Have you ever been led by someone like Sir Richard Branson who cared for you like family and dared you to achieve more than you ever thought possible for yourself, your organization and even society?

We three authors have all been inspired by leaders who changed the way we saw ourselves. We’ve also been on the other side, influencing others to achieve more than they ever thought they could. We have had the privilege of working with leaders from all over the world, including CEOs, board members, teachers, doctors and nurses who recognize themselves or their best bosses in Sir Richard’s approach.

While truly awe-inspiring in his achievements, Sir Richard is not unique in his people-and-goals centered leadership philosophy. George’s book, the international bestseller *Hostage at the Table: How Leaders Can Overcome Conflict, Influence Others, and Raise Performance*, included one chapter on this very topic. He explained how hostage negotiators, business leaders or anybody in a position of influence succeed when they are “secure bases” for others. For the purposes of leadership development, we define a secure base as:

**a person, place, goal or object that provides a sense of protection, safety and caring *and* offers a source of inspiration and energy for daring, exploration, risk taking and seeking challenge.**

Many *Hostage at the Table* readers and others we work with were eager to know more about how they could both be a secure base and have secure bases. *Care to Dare* shows them and you

how to provide that magical combination of safety and stretch and how to become a “Secure Base Leader” no matter where you are working and regardless of your title or your profession.

George’s use of the hostage metaphor created a new frame of reference for leadership: he showed leaders how not to be helpless or powerless in the face of an obstacle, whether it be a person, place, thing or even themselves. Secure bases provide a “hostage-free” psychological state. How? People who have secure bases are not held back by their fears: they dare to overcome even the greatest obstacles. Think of Nelson Mandela, who spent 27 years in prison and never felt like a hostage, or Gandhi, who transformed India without any formal political power.

*Care to Dare* shows you how to become a Secure Base Leader so that you release your followers from the fears that get in the way of their performance. This book is the result of our collective thoughts, experience and research on the subject. It teaches you how you can unleash astonishing potential by building the trust, delivering the change and inspiring the focus that underpin sustainable high performance. Secure Base Leadership works at the personal, team and organizational level. You care enough to dare people to reach for their dreams and, in the process, you return to your very own humanity.

Collaborating on this book makes sense for the three of us authors who have known each other and worked together in various capacities for more than a decade. The content reflects our different perspectives; our three sets of experience add up to a powerful combination of broad academic theory and profound practical knowledge. Our goal is to give you insight, understanding and coaching so that you can put these concepts into action today.

George first became acquainted with the concept of secure base when he was pursuing his doctorate in clinical psychology. Like all psychology students, he read the post-war research of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth concerning attachment theory. The basic premise of this theory is that humans are innately driven to

seek closeness to, and comfort from, a person who gives them a sense of protection. Throughout his lifelong education, George has been privileged to meet and learn from many leading thinkers like Carl Rogers, Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, Jim Lynch, Eric Berne, Eva Reich, Warren Bennis and Daniel Goleman. Their work has informed George's understanding of leaders as human beings. His experience working with law enforcement agencies as a hostage negotiator and domestic violence mediator required him to be a secure base in many tense situations. These experiences, one of which he describes in Chapter 1, confirmed to him the dual need to be a secure base and have a secure base. His interest in the secure base concept deepened throughout his career as a clinical psychologist and his service in roles such as the director of the Shiloah Institute, a counseling center, and as President of the International Transactional Analysis Association.

Over time, George moved into the world of executive education. Through venues such as the landmark High Performance Leadership program at IMD business school, George has had the opportunity to share his work with thousands of leaders all over the world. He has seen too many examples of leaders who fail because they lack secure bases. He has also seen the power of Secure Base Leadership in action and the fundamental difference it can make in people's lives.

Susan and George met in 2001 while she was Vice President, Communications at Tetra Pak, the world's leading liquid food processing and packaging company. He invited her to be a leadership coach at IMD and she also had the pleasure of working with him in the writing of *Hostage at the Table*. A former Olympic finalist, Susan experienced the power of secure bases and the "Mind's Eye" at a young age during an international swimming career that led her to be ranked sixth in the world. She has combined qualifications in communications, organizational psychology, marketing, coaching and the neuroscience of leadership with a Masters in Consulting and Coaching for Change and more than 20 years of

senior management experience in global organizations. Motherhood has also been a powerful inspiration for her from both perspectives: “having a secure base” and “being a secure base.” An experienced executive coach, lecturer and leadership consultant, Susan is passionate about working with people to turn knowledge into behavior and to create the conditions for healthy high performance.

Duncan met George while studying for his MBA at IMD. George invited him to be a leadership coach at IMD as well. Inspired by the core psychological theory of secure base, Duncan sought to further explore its value in organizational life. His exploration culminated in his 2010 doctoral thesis on the topic of Secure Base Leadership. His role in the research, which distilled the nine characteristics of Secure Base Leadership, contributed greatly to this book. As a faculty member at Ashridge Business School and as a leadership consultant to numerous for-profit and not-for-profit organizations, Duncan is driven by a desire to improve individual and collective well-being. He has taught Secure Base Leadership throughout the world and has seen its power and applicability across cultures and industries.

The three of us are united in our belief that Secure Base Leadership can transform leaders, teams and organizations. As a Secure Base Leader, you can *Care to Dare*. Notice that the title reflects the two sides of Secure Base Leadership: caring and daring. You cannot have one without the other. Secure Base Leaders unleash astonishing potential by building the trust, delivering the change and inspiring the focus that underpin high performance.

What do we mean by “high performance”? Our definition of high performance is challenging yourself and others to see and achieve what is beyond normal expectation. High performance becomes “robust” or “sustainable” when people remain attached to both people and goals in their pursuit of success. In our experience of working with high performance leaders, many have strong attachments to goals and have achieved success from a materialistic

perspective. However, they may feel a sense of loneliness or lack of fulfillment because, in pursuit of their goals, they have lost or weakened their connection to people. When the drive to achieve financial goals is not balanced by the bonding to people, there is a danger of many physical, psychological and social consequences that include psychosomatic stress, addiction, burnout and depression—all of which obviously detract from overall success.

From extensive interviews with executives from all over the world as well as quantitative surveys with more than one thousand executives, we have identified the nine characteristics that Secure Base Leaders display on a daily basis. During the interviews, we were fascinated to watch executives realize the *who* behind the *what* of their success. People often forget the way their thinking has been influenced, and it can be an emotional and powerful moment when they recognize the people, goals and other entities that have shaped them.

A leader truly stands on the shoulders of others; the myth of a leader being a self-made person is only half true. Our research shows that a primary difference between a successful leader and a failed leader is the presence or absence of secure bases in his or her life. Having secure bases reduces anxiety and fear, and it increases trust and risk taking. In an organization, the secure base may be a boss, peers, colleagues, the corporation itself, the work or even the product.

Secure Base Leadership is more than a set of skills—the “doing.” It is first and foremost a way of “being.” Since leadership is a learned behavior, you can always learn new ways to be a Secure Base Leader. In this book, we give lots of actionable advice to help you learn the skills that will put you in the right state of mind to encourage the right actions. Because people gain insights from the experiences of others, we share stories, both long and short, including some of our own. In the cases where confidentiality was requested, we have changed the names of the characters.

This book will take you on a journey during which you will discover your own secure bases, past and present, and determine how you can be a secure base for other people in your life at work and at home. You cannot reap the full benefit of this book if you simply read the words. When we write, “Ask yourself . . .” we want you to pause, think and even capture your insights in a journal. In so doing, you will build your self-awareness and take a big step toward change. We encourage you to pick a few of the characteristics to work on. We hope that you will engage in the personal quest we propose in Chapter 7 in order to identify the secure bases who have influenced you.

Along this journey be prepared to delve into your past. You will find that the lines between work and home, professional and personal blur as you do this work. You are indeed one human with one brain, one set of fears and one very deep well of astonishing potential. Just as you need to draw upon your personal life in order to develop as a leader, you will learn to be a better secure base to people outside of work by becoming a Secure Base Leader. In fact, many people we work with find the concepts equally important in their roles as parents, spouses, siblings and friends. We encourage you to make those links. Let yourself be a complete person. Let yourself be fully human. Let yourself live all your dreams with full joy.

In fact, our greatest hope is that you can be fully human and also accept the full humanity of others. When enough people within an organization care to dare and practice Secure Base Leadership, they humanize the organization itself. Organizations become better places for people to be, where they can feel valued and supported and where they can feel encouraged and inspired.

Practice Secure Base Leadership on a daily basis and you can contribute to making any group, be it a family, a team or an organization, a healthier, more fertile and vibrant place to be. People who come to understand and apply the concepts of Secure Base Leadership have a life-changing experience.

If you allow it to be, this book itself can become a secure base for you, encouraging and inspiring you as you progress on your leadership and life journey.

Enjoy the read and embrace the adventure!

GEORGE, SUSAN & DUNCAN



*“Deep within humans dwell those slumbering powers; powers that would astonish them, that they never dreamed of possessing; forces that would revolutionize their lives if aroused and put into action.”*

-Orison Swett Marden  
1850-1924  
American Writer

