

# ELEVATING CEO CONSCIOUSNESS

**6 STEPS  
FOR LEADERSHIP  
IN THE STORM**

**MARC-ANTOINE TSCHOPP**

Foreword by Om Swami

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On the journey of life, we meet numerous co-travelers. And every person we meet has hopes, dreams, ambitions, and stories hiding in their hearts like warmth in ember. But we don't remember all of them. In fact, only a handful of people make an indelible impression on our minds. Marc-Antoine Tschopp, or MAT as we call him lovingly, is one such person for me.

In the last three decades, I have had the good fortune of meeting some truly remarkable people. From billionaires to the most erudite scholars and teachers, from world-class athletes to amazing writers, and I learned something from each of them. However, my first impression when I met MAT in 2015 was a different story. Here was a wonderful person, a successful entrepreneur, a life coach, but he carried and exuded zen-like serenity. The kind that comes from a person who is no longer anxious about things beyond our control, the type that comes from the one who is in harmony with the world around him. And there is much to be learned from such people. For, there are a million books out there that can give you all kinds of information, but only a few speak from genuine experience.

*Elevating CEO Consciousness* is one such book. It is full of great insight to help anyone master and apply the art of leadership not only in business but in all aspects of their lives.

Going back to my first meeting with MAT, I remember a particular visual where he was sitting quietly bathing in the warm winter sun in the Himalayan mountains (that's where I live) unaffected by the lack of amenities due to the remoteness of the place. In my humble opinion, someone operating with a higher level of CEO Consciousness must have that serenity of mind. The storms will be raging around you, but that doesn't mean the rage should storm out of you to deal with the challenges. For, a great CEO is not someone who's always

screaming on the field like a worked-up football coach but also bonding with his team in silence back in the dressing room.

And that's precisely where MAT does an excellent job in *Elevating CEO Consciousness*. He goes to the root of the issue: your mind, your consciousness. Sharing interesting lessons, he makes this heady cocktail mixing his own experiences with a wide array of philosophies—both from the East and the West—offering us a truly holistic view of leadership.

As Bear Grylls says in *If I Could Tell You Just One Thing*:

*It is not the most masculine, macho, or the ones with the biggest muscles who win. It's those who look after each other, who remain cheerful in adversity, who are kind and persistent and positive. These are the characteristics that help you, not just to survive life but to enjoy it. The people who are successful are the ordinary ones that just go that little bit further, who give a little more than they are asked to, who live within that extra five percent.*

While each one of us has to walk our own path and arrive at the truth in our manner, *Elevating CEO Consciousness* does a wonderful job of carving out a path for the reader. MAT doesn't just go a little bit further but a lot further than most authors I've read. At times, you will feel like you are reading a deep work of philosophy.

The Storm, the paths, the map, the compass, and the true north. He has simplified the whole journey and art of leadership covering strategies and enhancing the fundamental idea of being mindful and thriving in a constant flow of awareness.

What I find beautiful about MAT and his book is that it is not just the message but the messenger too is grounded in reality and truth.

It is, perhaps, why I could not say no to writing a foreword for him and I'm mighty glad that I didn't say no. After all, what could possibly be more joyous than the feeling that you've done your two cents' worth to make this world a better place, to make a difference in someone's life? That's exactly what MAT and his work stand for: making a positive difference in the lives of others. So, "no" wasn't an option. The readers—who may or may not be CEOs— that will benefit from this read and resultantly run more purposeful and meaningful organizations is potent enough a cause that warrants nothing else but a yes.

This book is unique in ways more than one. If you are pressed for time, you can just randomly open any page and give it a go and in great likelihood, you will walk away with an insight.

I hope you enjoy and gain from this read tremendously and go on to do beautiful things with your blessed lives.

Peace

Om Swami

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# Introduction

Somewhere beyond right and wrong, there is a garden. I will meet you there.

— Jalal Ad-Din Rumi

"More than fifty thousand dead and twenty four million people affected in the space of a few minutes, it is hardly believable. What a tragedy for these Turkish and Syrian families, as if they didn't have enough suffering already," Selim shares with me as we begin our session.

I remember my recent stay in Istanbul. The tourists from all over the world who, with me, are waiting in the long queue to enter the Hagia Sophia. The boats that transit between east and west are filled with Ukrainian foodstuffs. The Çamlica Camii, a huge complex worthy of a sixteenth-century Ottoman emperor, was recently built in honor of the influential leader of the moment and is supposed to accommodate hundred thousand people in case of an earthquake. Unfortunately, it is too late or too far for these refugees.

I could bounce off Selim's comment and bemoan the egos of those politicians who run countries and seem to abuse their power, but I know he doesn't appreciate those who feed on unpleasant emotions. Neuroticism is not one of his personality traits.

Selim is conscientious. He must run his business and doesn't have time to think about how to impress his opponents by showing that he is the strongest. This morning, he has to let go of a 60-year-old executive. He is putting the brakes on the growth strategy he sold to his shareholders and his teams. Selim knows he must do it, but it pains him greatly because he has known this employee for over 20 years.

He is quick to reason. He serves the common good, and that means firmness and courage. Yesterday, he was working on the fears of recession and the drain of resources due to the great resignation. The day before yesterday, it was the new disrupters and the war for talent. Tomorrow morning, it will be AI solutions and the repositioning of his core business.

He's running. It excites him, and he feels useful. Complacent smiles give him plenty of attention to remind him of his importance. Inspiring, listening, thinking, and deciding are the fuels that keep him going.

But for some time now, he has found himself doubting. One of his close friends died suddenly at the age of 45. He was athletic and ate well. He also ran. His two young children did not have time to discover what a wonderful person he was.

Although he impressed his world with his confidence, he no longer really recognized himself in his role. At night, alone in his hotel room, Selim wonders if he is really doing the right thing. He feels tired and has trouble looking at himself in the mirror. This race seems never-ending. The acronym VUCAEST (VUCA was coined in 1987, based on the leadership theories of Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus to describe or reflect on the volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity of general conditions and situations) has just been revealed to him. It is true that everything becomes more Erratic, Speedy, and Turbulent.

He needs to find his flame and asks me: "Are you sure that humans are as good as you claim?"

"Why are you asking me this question?" I reply.

"Because it's hard to be good when I'm about to fire someone and especially because I think we are born pure and innocent, but we become selfish, violent, and immoral with time."

This is a valid observation, and the question needs clarification. For whom is it necessary to be good? Myself, the one who disturbs others or those who want to move forward? And how can we evaluate what is the right thing to do? It addresses a fundamental theme. The kind we ask ourselves when we are torn between satisfying physical and psychological desires or serving environmental and spiritual causes.

I was only four years old when JFK was assassinated, six years old for Malcolm X, and nine years old for Martin Luther King Jr., yet I still remember those black-and-white images my father watched on television. I also remember the demonstrators who put flowers on the end of police guns to demand peace in Vietnam, the students who flipped cars in the streets of Paris, and the monks who set themselves on fire to show their disagreement. There were also Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin happily jumping on the moon, and thousands of half-naked youths rolling around in the mud at Woodstock. I could immediately tell the difference between what was right and what was wrong.

But the older I got, the more complicated that distinction became. The Concorde flew from Paris to New York in three hours but consumed two hundred forty tons of fuel per trip. PCs and the internet became available to everyone, but interpersonal

communication became poorer. The Berlin Wall and the Cold War fell, but ethnic and economic wars increased tenfold. Medicines spread, but diseases became more complex. Access to the stock market was democratized, but financial crises increased. Amazon was created and small retailers disappeared. Facebook brought us closer and voters were manipulated. The World Trade Center towers fell and axes of evil were fought on the other side of the globe. A black president was elected in the US and Snowden revealed secrets. Russia annexed Crimea and Trump made friends with Kim Jong-un. The masks of COVID dissipated in joy as the Iranian chādors flew away in terror. The fight against global warming preoccupied decision-makers for a decade, but every year brought new heat records. The Kremlin bear wanted to reclaim his former empire, and a comedian received billions to counter him.

Selim has to make crucial decisions and wants to regain the enthusiasm that inspired many talents to follow him. He shares with me a definition of intelligence: the ability to adapt to a new situation, understand and solve specific difficulties, make sense of the events around us, and act with discernment, and says: "I understand these words. I can think well and have learned to manage my emotions, but that's no longer enough to know what to do in this turmoil."

I agree with him, we need to develop the attitude of the wise, those who call upon intelligence that is free from the influence of our biological body and unconscious psychology, those who connect to their true self, the source of who we are. We must become conscious leaders to inspire those young talents who have lost faith in our economic and political systems.

This book is the result of twenty five years of research and trials. It guides you to increase your leadership and impact in a world that is losing its bearings. I intend to prepare you to be a conscious, authentic,

and successful leader who seizes the opportunities that storms bring. Someone who remains calm and perceives subtle information to build discernment. Someone who listens to their consciousness to make tough and compassionate decisions for all stakeholders.

The stories are true. I have only changed the names and specific details to protect the privacy of the protagonists. The theory and graphs presented in later chapters are distilled from forty years of empirical observations and scientific studies. I aim to share simple tools that have helped thousands of C-Suite Executives make their best decisions confidently and simply. It will not only help you win hearts and minds during board meetings and complex negotiations but also help you find serenity outside of the workplace.

You can follow my proposed structure or use the table of contents to pick a theme that appeals to you.

Chapter 1 illustrates the kind of storms we are facing.

In Chapter 2, we explore the two mindsets. They are the paths that open before us whenever the storm arrives: we either close in on ourselves and our fellow human beings or open up to everything that's around us and experience true abundance.

Like any navigator sailing into unfamiliar waters, you need a map, a compass, and a true north to steer by, and I have them for you.

Chapter 3 will give you the map of human relationships. You will discover the nineteen strategies we use to deal with new challenges, often unconsciously.

Chapter 4 will provide you with a simple compass that you can use in any situation at any time.

Chapter 5 will help you define your true north, the one within you, the one that makes you unique and powerful, the one that's aligned with your purpose and values, and the one that will allow you to remain serene and joyful as you face every new encounter with clarity and without fear.

# The Storm

## There Is No Such Thing As Chance

When I went to school, they asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. I said, "Happy." They told me I didn't understand the question. I told them they didn't understand life.

— John Lennon

It's a sunny morning, and the smiling voice of Johnny Clegg, 'the White Zulu,' fills my car. I feel proud and important.

Daniel, the new CEO of Darewest, had warned me how COVID had made underlying problems surface at the company. The previous management team's plans had been too ambitious, the group had been drowning in debt, and the balance sheet needed a fast fix. Calm, introverted, results-oriented, and detail-minded, Daniel knew what to do. A third of his 1,200 employees would have to go. It was a painful ordeal. Darewest had employed generations of the same families in this poor region for a hundred years or more. The company had underpinned the whole community, but what other choice did Daniel have?

Now, eighteen months later, they still need help. Used to working under paternalistic and directive leadership, many of its longer-serving managers cannot accept the responsibility of making difficult but necessary decisions. Employees, middle management, and some EXCO members have lost confidence, and key people are leaving. Recruiting the right talent is difficult.

They need a savior, so today, I'm going to sit down with their leadership team and suggest ways to put their traumatic past behind them and help them regain the commitment they need from their workforce. But this inner savior of mine is different from the one from my early years. Today I know he is just an actor in a play called Darewest. I must play this part to the fullest, without fear of fluffing my lines and with the confidence to share my truth.

*There is no such thing as chance... and I am not here by chance.* My presence is the culmination of all my previous actions. My role is to encourage the leadership team to express the hidden truth because others haven't done so before. It's as simple as that. I want them to see that they can choose to play their roles too and not allow fear, anger, sadness, guilt, or shame to decide their futures.

Looking back on my past experiences, I see many such moments of "truth." They never happened by chance, and they always brought me essential gifts, even if I didn't see them as such at the time.

I settled back into the Swiss Mountains for the first time in months. Big, gentle snowflakes drifted down, deepening an already pleasant and powerful silence, but they couldn't soothe me. My apartment was as empty as my heart. My wife had left me because I had given all of it to my job, and even when I did spend time with her, my mind was still at work. She had lost hope, and I couldn't blame her. I tried to handle the situation the same way I usually handled my challenges at work,

believing that for every problem, there is a solution, but this time there wasn't. We had an amicable divorce, but now all I had left was work and my close family. I had no friends.

"Can you come in after tomorrow? We have a new assignment starting." My boss knew I had five vacation days scheduled, but he asked anyway because it's always "customer first" at McKinsey, and I couldn't say no. The deep silence that couldn't soothe me had grown, evolving into a heaviness that never left. I couldn't help wondering what had gone wrong. I was successful and having fun, so why did I feel so bad? Why did I feel too weak just to say no for once? I loathed myself for this, and the feeling became unbearable. Two days later, I was bombarded with information in my new client's meeting room, but it went in one ear and out the other. I couldn't retain anything, and at night I couldn't sleep. How had I gotten there?

Three days later, I went to see my boss: "My divorce is catching up with me. I can't concentrate."

"You have a year," he said. "Come back whenever you want."

I don't know which was the greater revelation – the relief that flooded me or the realization that all along I had only needed to ask.

*There is no such thing as chance... but maybe opportunities arise for us to better balance our professional, private, and personal lives.*

It was raining outside. Old advertising posters clung to the walls. The furniture in this place had last been in fashion several years ago, probably at the tail-end of this company's glory years. These are just details, but you tend to notice them when you're a roving management consultant.

## Our Friend Ego

I don't know about you, but I constantly oscillate between "good" and "evil." On the one hand, I regulate myself and others to ensure fairness for all. On the other hand, I look for loopholes in the system to gain personal advantage. Let's look deeper at the ego and its bad reputation.

*"I should get rid of my ego"* is a phrase I often hear but disagree with. Without it, we would not be here. It's a friend who constantly serves us, especially when storms arrive. It makes us vigilant in the face of danger, seeking allies and making judgments. It alerts us to threatening situations and guides our responses, but in the absence of real threats, it can become our enemy.

Our bodies, emotions, and thoughts are on alert when danger threatens us. They manifest themselves so intensely that consciousness and presence take a back seat. Our ego takes over. Pain avoidance and pleasure-seeking become our primary drivers. It gives us the energy to find safety at all costs. Once there, if we continue to pursue sensual rewards, we disconnect ourselves from more profound wisdom and want to stay in our conform zone. We act without moderation. We seek to possess the things we desire. We become transactional and materialistic. The fear of dying, losing money, becoming dependent on others, aging, or falling ill may all possess us.

Our true self knows that we need a certain amount of suffering to evolve. Without hunger, we cannot fully appreciate the food offered to us. Without war, we cannot enjoy peace. Only after we experience particularly unpleasant moments can we truly savor the wonder of the present moment. The path to the true north does not lie in

complacency and comfort. It is found by examining in detail the nature of our unpleasant emotions, limiting beliefs, and painful feelings. When I observe, understand, and embrace my suffering, I allow compassion and love to grow in me and around me.

Why is it so difficult to escape from our pleasure-seeking and discomfort-avoiding side? Let's imagine that we need to cross a field that's packed with dense vegetation. The first thing we need to do is clear a path with machetes. Once we have created this small trail, it's the only one we'll take. We never make another, and soon it becomes well-worn.

The same principle applies to the synaptic paths we create during the first months after birth. Each time a similar sensation, emotion, or thought is re-experienced, our system will follow the same mental pathway we cleared with our first experiences. These neural networks are myelinated. Myelin is a substance that surrounds the neurons so that they conduct electricity. This substance is abundant before the age of eight and during puberty, which is why our childhood patterns of thoughts and behaviors persist throughout our lives. They become hardwired, and forever after, these pathways act like filters that make us see life subjectively.

A baby elephant can be punished into accepting a solid chain on its foot and no longer trying to escape so that by the time it's an adult; its handlers only need to use a rope to enforce its ongoing captivity. Similarly, what we experience and how others react to us helps us to quickly understand which behaviors and experiences are rewarding and which are not. If mom feeds us at the first sign of hunger, our approach to the relationship will be calm and constructive, and we will feel confident. But if we are not satisfied immediately, fear stimulates us to start waving our little arms around. If food appears, we now understand that we must be active to get what we want.

If the food still doesn't come, we cry and scream, and if it does arrive at this point, we now understand that this is what it takes to get what we need. A tantrum equals a reward. But if the food still doesn't come, we will eventually be forced to shut up and wait. We become submissive. Suppressing our emotions and freezing when in danger are our only strategies. The more we experience events like these, the more our reactional behaviors become anchored.

Depending on which approach worked best for us, we will continue to use the mental pathway we first cleared with our metaphorical machete and reinforce it during our first encounters with strangers, especially in kindergarten and beyond.

The kids conditioned into silence early on will observe the dance between bully and victim and avoid conflicts. Later, as grown-ups at work, where disputes are more diffuse and subtle, they will want to ignore or dodge these situations. Having gotten what they wanted through yelling and hitting, other children will feel comfortable with conflict and will not hesitate to pressure others.

We may go through our entire lives not appreciating how conditioned we are and how much that conditioning affects our behavior. I suggest stepping back and making a conscious decision to examine your inner narrative. Here's mine, taken to its extreme:

*I care about myself first and foremost. As an alpha male, I feel superior. I identify with those who are similar. I gain strength from those who live and think like me. I know we are right. Those who are different make me angry. I constantly observe and judge what they do. I am very conscious of my appearance and take pride in it. I dominate others with arrogance and indifference. When things don't happen as they should, it's their fault. There is no question about it. I confidently ride the wave of success until the s\*\*\* hits the fan. An illness, a mistake, a promotion I don't get, a failure I have to accept. Any unwelcome surprise like this derails me. A storm has arrived. I feel lost and vulnerable.*

*I need to hide. A depressive mood overtakes me. I ruminate on the same issues over and over. I envy those who seem more successful and look for the weaknesses or privileges they might have. Soon, thoughts about the future and the past will haunt me. I struggle to accept the uncertainty of my current situation. I become very possessive and fearful of losing everything. I flee into illusory hopes and dreams. When I look back over my past, regrets come. I feel guilty for my abusive actions and sad that I didn't do what was right. The weight on my shoulders grows. I have little energy left to fight. I take refuge in addictions such as coffee, nicotine, food, work, flirting, alcohol, pills, and even drugs, and it becomes a vicious circle. An enormous storm is arriving. "There is no such thing as chance..." comes to my mind, "But I don't want this chance," my ego answers.*

Of course, this can start off feeling uncomfortable. Still, if you take a step back and consciously follow the route your thoughts naturally take, you will uncover inbuilt tendencies that you may not have been aware of. The paths you laid down in childhood may be well-worn, but as an adult, you can recognize them, and then take others.

The chart below helps us understand the different emotions we experience in the ego or **survival state**. We first look at ourselves, and depending on our level of self-confidence, we might feel superior or inferior. When we feel self-assured and arrogant, others will trigger our anger if they don't do what we expect from them. When we feel insecure and depressed, we will envy others and complain. In any case, we will separate from all those who differ from us and judge them to justify our choice.

Our thoughts are very much conditioned by our future and our past. We hope for better times or fear losing our current advantages and routines. Looking at the past, we may feel sadness, guilt, shame, and disgust depending on our capacity to deal with our suffering.



**CHART 2: EMOTIONAL REACTION WHEN ACTIVATED BY OUR EGO**

We all perceive the world differently, according to our own experiences, beliefs, education, and previous encounters. As I said, our mental constructs are acquired early in childhood and stay with us. If we remain asleep to our conditioning, then we may not be so well prepared when the storms inevitably come.

We, humans, have faced frequent environmental changes throughout our evolution, and there are more on the way today. One of my firm beliefs about nature is its constant aim to compensate for the imbalances generated by external and internal pressures and to restore an ideal equilibrium between all beings and their environment. I've noticed that when I see a possible solution to correct momentary imbalances with my resources, I perceive the situation as a positive challenge, and my energy level rises. But when I feel trapped without the choice to change something, the challenge becomes unpleasant, and my energy diminishes. So, it is not the challenge that

## **Name Your Emotion**

The easiest way to identify the emotion you are experiencing is to have a list of them at hand, then pause regularly and ask yourself which one you are experiencing at that moment. Here is a simple list. I suggest you copy it to your phone and play with it for a while. It's essential to get comfortable with this because expressing our emotions verbally rather than non-verbally will significantly improve our interpersonal communication.

I strongly recommend that you take a picture of the following lists of emotions and have them handy on your phone to identify your emotions.

CONFIDENT	HAPPY	ALIVE	SERENE
Understood	Cheerful	Energetic	Centered
Open	Lucky	Liberated	Aligned
Reliable	Delighted	Optimist	In Integrity
Amused	Pleased	Provocative	Honorable
Free	Overjoyed	Impulsive	Stoic
Friendly	Content	Animated	Equanimous
Satisfied	Jubilant	Fragrant	Calm
Responsive	Fortunate	Thrilled	Peaceful
Accepted	Grateful	Frisky	At ease
Kind	Festive	Crazy	Relaxed
Surprised	Ecstatic	Vivid	Tranquil
Watchful	In a good mood	Wonderful	Composed

## Your Strengths Are Your Values

You only understand the true value of happiness when you hear the sound it makes when it closes the door.

—Serge Tschopp, my father

Like the mountain climber who wants to reach the summit, I wanted to reach the heights of happiness, but I was never fully satisfied when I got there. Each time I achieved something that I thought would make me happy, it didn't, and I realized that I had created my own misery.

*At the beginning of the last century, there were only a few territories left on earth for explorers to test themselves against and the South Pole was one of them. Roald Amundsen, a Norwegian adventurer, was the first to reach the Pole on December 14, 1911, after only 99 days of walking. Two other explorers were aiming for the same goal. The English captain Robert Falcon Scott succeeded 33 days after Amundsen but died with his men on the return journey, and Sir Ernest Shackleton would never reach it despite three attempts. He would spend almost two years stuck on the southern ice doing everything to save his crew, and yet today, Shackleton is the one who's best remembered, even though he failed. Unlike Scott who sacrificed his life in pursuit of his goal, Shackleton was a kind, thoughtful, and tenacious leader. When a man lost his gloves, Shackleton insisted that the man took his. When a chronic*

*malcontent felt ill, he invited him into his cabin to nurse him. To avoid boredom, he would assign novel activities and encourage collaboration between his companions even though his ship had been stuck in the ice for several months.*

Shackleton's story showed me that living according to my values is more important than achieving some lofty goal.

So, what do you value and enjoy doing most? If you don't know, I suggest trying two approaches to help you find out.

The first measures your character strengths. These positive parts of your personality make you feel authentic and engaged. There is a test that helps you to prioritize 24 strengths and you can find it here: <http://www.viacharacter.org>.

The second approach is to relax and think of three or four moments in your life when you felt fully energized. Take the time to think about them in detail. What did you do? What was the environment like? What did you enjoy most? Who was with you?

With your memories in mind and without thinking too hard, read through the inventory written in brackets below. Begin by underlining 10-15 verbs (or words) that represent you, challenge you, fascinate you, or that you feel strongly about.

1. VENTURE (Risk, Experiment, Go into the unknown, Speculate, Strive to do something, Dare, Seek, Undertake, Thrill)
2. DISCOVER (Learn, Locate, Discern, Detect, Distinguish, Perceive, Observe, Test)
3. TRANSFER (Educate, Prepare, Inform, Instruct, Elevate, Enlighten, Explain, Train)

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