



The Mindset of a Leader

A guide to conscious leadership

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1. About these Scribblings

This is my attempt to describe the mindset behind the reinvented leadership in the beginning of the 21st century, a mindset you could call **conscious leadership**.

The mindset is the “tapestry on our walls”, and hence provides the framing for our presence. This mindset is the omnipresent set of thoughts, paradigms, and philosophical approaches that we, the conscious leaders, base every action on. The mindset is nothing without actions. The actions are nothing without the mindset.

In this sense leadership is a complex and multidimensional thing, covering philosophy, approach, daily governance, and interpersonal activities. Going forward the term *leadership* will cover all this.

Also, leadership is highly contextual, and will at all times require a translation to the specific organisation, leader, employees, type and scale of resources, skills, and competences. You need to perform that translation to *your* needs as you read this. Hence, the mindset contains an infinite set of contextual mindsets, but with the same bearing points.

This document does not contain models, tools or instructions. You could see this as a guideline or even a Manifesto to believe in and exercise, or as an inspirational documentation of current practices of leadership. It is totally up to you.

2. Foreword

Leadership is hard work. Leadership is demanding and takes time and slows you down until you have got the hang of it.

Leadership is also rewarding, immensely giving, and attracting, and once you have “tasted the kool-aid”, you just want more.

Leadership is not for everyone. I have met people that never ever could work this way.

The successful leaders I have met are hardworking, people-oriented, result-oriented, gentle, engaging, empathetic leaders, who you would dedicate enormous amounts of hours to.

Personally I have been on this route for 10-12 years, working at and with companies like Novo Nordisk, Danske Bank, DONG Energy, COWI, and Rambøll, continuously more and more aware of my behaviour and mindset. I still make mistakes, but I have “tasted the kool-aid” and strive to inspire others to do the same.

This document contains both my idealistic framing and practical learnings from numerous engagements in large Danish global organisations.

I hope you’ll be inspired, because going to work should be nice, great, and awesome.

Erik Korsvik Østergaard, December 2015

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5. Leadership as a Lifestyle

Leadership is not only for your 9-5 job; it is a lifestyle

Leadership is a part of your approach to everyone. Your family, your parents, your kids, your spouse. In traffic, in sports, in politics, in the grocery shop, when making music. Online and offline.

Leadership is a choice

Engaging in leadership is an active, deliberate, conscious choice. You are not born with it. It is a choice that only you can take. To some people, the choice of leadership is an epiphany.

Leadership is about people

Leadership is about trust, respect, safety, and well-being, and it will make people thrive. Leadership is about releasing the power in yourself, the individual, and the team by acknowledging each other's existence, approach, and opinion.

Leadership is about believing in each other

I can only be my best, when you are your best. We strive to make each other exceed our dreams.

Leadership is about authenticity

Be yourself at all times. Be human. Do not leave your personal life, at the doorstep when you go to work. Strive to be the same in all situations at work. If you change your leadership style from situation to situation, you lose peoples trust in you.

Leadership is about emotions

A leadership culture embraces emotions, beliefs and opinions. A leader should be empathetic and have sympathy, and must strive to understand strengths and flaws, both in ourselves and our colleagues.

Leadership is visionary and ambitious

A leader creates visions and dreams, and engages both himself/herself and the organisation in them.

A leader is ambitious, both personally and on behalf of others.

Leadership is about purpose

Rallying for cause with great energy and determination is a fundamental part of leadership. Engaging people with and for a purpose and a vision is the strongest catalyst for commitment, great results, and productivity, while still at the same time nurturing well-being.

Leadership is about ensuring that every action in the team supports the purpose, and that it makes sense and is meaningful. You need to know why you go to work. It has to make sense to you, your team, for your product, for the organisation, and for the customers. If it does not make sense, then stop.

A leader sets the direction and explains the purpose (WHY)

A leader provides tools, when and if you need it (HOW)

A leader provides clear demands, requirements, expectations, directions, and framing, when and if you need it (WHAT and WHEN and WHO)

Leadership is about profit

It is also about making money. Focusing on results, revenue, and profit, on deadlines and great products, and on great and long-lasting customer experiences and relations.

A leader drives results, and minimises procrastination.

Leadership is also about joy and freedom at work

A leader builds organisations that are based on freedom, as opposed to fear and control.

Leadership is about joy and happiness at work through relations and results, which leads to greater engagement and higher productivity.

Leadership is a habit

The more you practice it, the more it becomes a habit, to the extent where your intuitive actions are all based on the leadership style

Leadership should be fun

Leadership is about being ambitious and enthusiastic, but do not make it a yoke. Do not work too much. Do not be a martyr.

Enjoy! Have fun 😊



6. Leadership in Attitude and Behaviour

Leadership does not require a title

Any member of the team can execute leadership. The leadership lifestyle can be applied by people in the frontline and by the top managers.

You don't need a title or high salary to be a leader. Leadership is a choice.

The leader is a role that shifts from time to time

Depending on the task at hand and on the members of the team, the leader should be the one who has the intention, drive, willingness, motivation, and skills to do so.

There will be three roles in teams going forward: The manager, who gets things done, cleans up, finalizes, makes sure we stick to the plan. The leader, who makes sure that we go in the right direction, and that everyone follows. The entrepreneur, who challenges the status quo and introduces new ways of solving the problems or providing the delivery.

Each leader and employee will surely have a preference to one of the roles. Based on the actual task, action, the specific team, and the impact of the delivery, the roles will shift to fit the situation.

A leader delegates, and pushes mandate out in the team

Everyone is encouraged to take a lead, drive actions, and make decisions. This is a natural consequence of the drive to push the power out in the organization.

Sure, they must seek advisory and counselling in the organization, before making the decisions. The larger impact of the decision, the more advisory they should seek.

Leadership is not a replacement for responsibility or accountability

You'll make a mistake, if you disclaim the accountability, acting as if there is no ultimate responsible person, leaving it all up to the employees.

The shared purpose and direction will fade. The joint collaboration will erode. The employees will get anxious about whether they perform well enough.

Leadership goes hand-in-hand with followership

Leadership is also about recognising, that someone other than you is the leader from time to time, and that you should follow him or her instead of fighting for your stripes and pulling rank. There might be team members, who actually know more than you, or have a better idea than you.

Respect their pace, approach, ideas, and thoughts. Provide respectful feedback and input if you disagree or have valuable experiences to share – or if it is clear that they are about to make a stupid mistake.

Leadership believes power is greatest when distributed in a team

The power in this kind of leadership is not about making people comply and produce stuff, but about making a profound, valuable difference to each other and the networked society. Hence, the power is greatest when distributed in and to the team.

Power from position is shallow and short-lasting. The collective intelligence and power of the networked organisation is the strongest force. We matter through people.

Leadership is based on communication and dialogue

Timely and transparent communication is a must. This includes filtering and translation, both upwards and downwards in the organisation, and simplification when needed.

Dialogue and listening skills are basic requirements. A leader strives to involve the team in decisions and design through dialogue.

Engagement is based on involvement. Ask the team and organisation for their input, suggestions, solutions, and opinions. Encourage their feedback, and let them challenge you and each other, respectfully.

Most likely you cannot see all solutions, problems, or opportunities from your chair. The team might even be smarter than you.

A leader understands that he or she does not know it all and hence needs the input and support from the team.

*If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.
(African proverb)*

Leadership requires transparency

Be transparent regarding direction, decisions, prioritisations, status, results, opinions etc. – and explain the reasoning behind these decisions, figures, and statements.

Going to the extreme is called “Open Book”, but it might not be suitable for all situations, leaders, or organisations. Do not be naively transparent.

And: Transparency is fake without feedback, involvement, and dialogue.

Leadership encourages reflection and learning

Continuous improvement is vital to leaders, to employees, and to the organisation. As Steven Covey puts it: Sharpen the Saw (Source: The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People).

Ensure that reflection is a natural part of the daily life and of processes, and that the learnings can be fed back in. We strive both for innovation and for improvement.

Leadership by example

A leader leads by example, both when it concerns interpersonal care and concrete actions.

You don't get respect from sitting in the Ivory Tower, thinking big thoughts and laying five-year plans. Step down. Write some code. Open PowerPoint or Photoshop. Take part in the actual work in the team. Contribute. Give feedback. Care. Show respect. Listen.

A leader is a mentor, and inspires and supports

One of the finest responsibilities and tasks of the leader is to be a mentor for the employees.

Build trust and intimacy with them, and provide guidance, experiences, good advice, and inspiration frequently. Do not wait until the half-yearly performance review (actually stop doing formal

performance reviews!), but do it on daily basis, all the time, frequently.

Do not be afraid to provide specific, concrete advice. You are a mentor not a coach. Be specific in your expectations to how the employee uses the advice – is it a requirement or a suggestion? Respect the employee's possibility to be a leader himself/herself.

A leader gives real-time recognition and feedback

The keyword here is real-time. Do not wait until a half-yearly review (that we just agreed to cancel) or the bi-weekly one-to-one talks.

Give credit immediately. Give feedback immediately, and both criticism and acknowledgement is needed. Be concrete and constructive. Focus on actions.

Leadership is situational to the employee and the task

A leader understands and applies *Situational Leadership*, all the time. The employee's approach to a given task depends on the skills, experiences, support, and motivation.

A leader cannot apply a one-size-fits-all type of leadership. You must provide that specific, unique mix of support, instruction, pace, patience, and motivation, that the specific, unique employees requires – in this specific, unique situation.

A leader ensures motivation

It is a joint responsibility between the leader and the employee to ensure motivation, which comes from autonomy, mastery, and purpose – and from connectedness.

You need to talk about this frequently, and you need to adjust your leadership according to the specific needs, requirements, and development wishes. This is an amendment to the Situational Leadership above.

Leadership strives towards healthy, balanced engagement

We do not encourage extreme engagement, but a healthy, balanced one. It is more about well-being and being able to focus (and to release focus), than about hours spent.

A leader celebrates results and gives credit where it should be

Remember to celebrate results, small and big. Make it clear to the team and the employee that we made it, and what value it created. Mention it both in public and in private to the employee(s) who made it happen. And, do it in real-time, as soon as possible.

Give credit to those who deserves it. Never take credit for other peoples work. Let everybody know that you are proud of him or her.

A leader creates a “no blame”-culture

Mistakes and failure is a part of being creative, innovative and productive.

A leader creates a culture where we do not hide mistakes, but share them with each other, discuss, and learn.

A leader admits failure and openly says, “I was wrong; I made a mistake; I’m sorry; I learned”.



7. Getting Things Done with Leadership

Be collaborative through relations

Relations are the key to collaboration. Teams that are established based on their internal relations perform better than teams that are established based on skills (source: MIT and The Technical University of Denmark)

Relations are built through spending time together, by showing trust and respect, by being personal, and by listening.

A leader is social, and nurses relations.

Understand the importance of organising

The classic organisation is the most common overall framing, and it is typically hierarchical. However, new organisational structures are emerging, focusing on *organising* rather than organisation. These types often are called “flat”, “networked”, or even “holacracy”.

An organisation based on leadership supports and encourages a *mix* of these structures, and that the team can choose their own structure and design. Inside and between these teams, leadership styles like this will thrive. Later, the team will re-organise or dissolve itself when needed.

Believe in robustness with agility

Robust and resilient organisations are based on flexibility and ability. They are prepared for changes (planned or not), and are fast to respond to them.

The Agile mindset goes hand-in-hand with this leadership mindset.

Encourage input from outside the team and the organisation

A leader understands the global, networked organisation, and thrives in it. It is totally acceptable – even encouraged – to seek expertise from outside the team, as we acknowledge that we do not know it all. Also, someone else might already have solved the problem we’re looking at. Nobody wins from reinventing the wheel.

Knowledge is not something you sit on, own, or trade like a currency. Knowledge is only powerful, if it is shared and flows like a current.

Understand how to lead from a distance both in time and space

Virtual leadership is an unneglectable part of networked or global teams.

A leader needs to know how to work with teams and employees that he/she cannot easily see and meet physically - either because

of a time-zone difference, or a physical separation in buildings, regions, countries or continents.

A leader encourages frequent dialogue, back-brief, and clear hand-over. A leader uses digital tools to set a direction, to have a dialogue, to be present, to give credit, and to participate in and encourage debate.

A leader strives to make all information – both communication and documents – available for all to read, update, share, and comment.

Encourage diversity and cross-cultural collaboration

Diversity is an asset, both regarding age, background, skillset, nationality, and religion. A leader must ensure to respect the employees and their differences, and strives to make them feel safe, comfortably directed, and high-performing.

A leader strives to understand the cultural differences in hierarchy and decision making, in approach to feedback, in understanding of time, in religious beliefs and national holidays, and in how personal you can and should be.

Provide clear demands, requirements, expectations, directions, and framing

Leave no doubt when it comes to expectations to deliverables and agreements.

Ensure that all parties agree on what and when to deliver, in what quality, how, and to what cost.

Do not leave room for unwanted interpretations, because you'll create uncertainty for the employees thereby killing their trust and safety.

Ensure that the employees know when they are done with their task

Make it clear when the result is there. Do not let the employee be in doubt.

Make the goals visible, and tie them into the overall purpose. Ensure that the progress is visible too. Celebrate when we meet the goal.

We like KPI's, but they have to make sense, be transparent, be supportive for the deliverable and the purpose, and make everyone feel safe and comfortable.



8. How to Start

Make the decision. Leadership is a choice.

It is a mind-shift

It's a skill-shift

It's a behaviour-shift

It's a culture-shift

(Source: Kenneth Mikkelsen and Anners Abild)

Go all in, perhaps not on all elements, but at least a handful, and always in small steps. Go find some inspiration. Go apply it.

Speak out to your leader, leadership peers and team members that you want to do this, and that you will make mistakes, and you need their support and feedback.

Write down your ambition and your dream. Look at that statement after some time and see how far you have gone. Celebrate.

Take a sip of the kool-aid, and inspire others too.

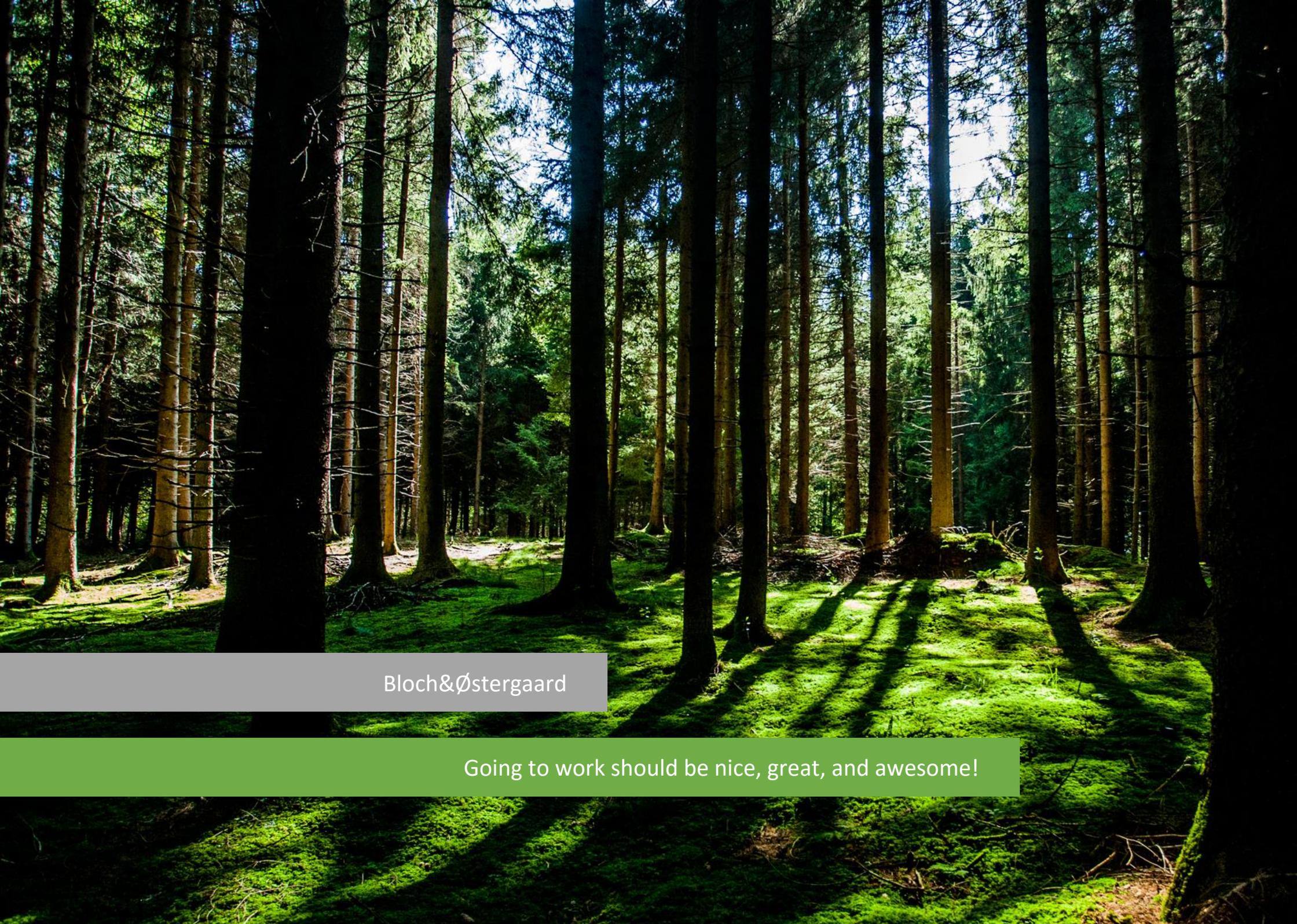
Remember: Going to work should be nice, great, and awesome.

9. Inspiration and Shout-out

If you want more, you can check these great people, movements, and organisations:

Anners Abild, Anne Skare Nielsen, Change Management Institute, Christoffer Hovde, Daniel Pink, Frederic Laloux, Freedom At Work, FutureShifts, Gary Hamel, Helena Roth, Henry Steward, Jacob Bøtter, Jesper Outzen, Josh Bersin, Kenneth Mikkelsen, Lars Kolind, Maya Drøschler, Ole Kassow, Roger Martin, Simon Sinek, Steven Covey, The WorldBlu organisation, Traci Fenton, Ugilic, UNBOSS, Woohoo Inc., Yvonne Fosser, Zappos ...

... and many more who work with leadership, future at work, social business, HR, and transformations.



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