On a warm day in July 2004, Rebecca Ivatury, a nursing student at the University of Central Florida, sat down to contemplate her nursing philosophy. Articulating a philosophy is common practice among nurses, and it can help young students clarify their values and reflect on how their beliefs fit with their professional practice. Rebecca had been thinking about hers for a while. After much self-reflection, she finally wrote:

I believe that the patient should be treated as a whole human being. My first obligation is safety in caring for the patient. This obligation resides in providing proficient care that will benefit the patient. As a competent nurse, I will apply what I have learned from theory and implement care that is based on research that benefits the patient. My next obligation resides in treating the human spirit of the patient, by this I mean providing empathy and compassion for the patient as a fellow human being. I know that my job satisfaction will occur when I have made the best possible choices in the care of my patient as a whole human being. (Ivatury 2016)

Rebecca loved being a nurse, and she enjoyed taking care of patients. Even when they asked the same questions over and over and
when they pushed the call button many times, they never bothered her. At the end of each day, she always felt fulfilled because she had helped them feel better.

Judging from the numerous cards and notes that she has received over the years, patients really appreciated what she did for them. One day, for example, a previous patient came back to see her after his hospital stay. He brought his granddaughter with him, and he gave Rebecca a thank-you note and a $50 restaurant gift card. He told Rebecca that when he was in the hospital, she once sat down with him and kindly explained to him how smoking was hurting his lungs. “I quit smoking and I never went back so I can be there for my granddaughter. I couldn’t have done that without your help,” he told her while fighting back his tears (Ivatury 2016).

Like millions of other healthcare professionals, Rebecca knew that compassion and kindness were a pivotal part of her job. The majority of nurses, doctors, and other direct care providers go into healthcare because they want to help others and exercise compassion and kindness. But does the same hold true for healthcare administrators in leadership positions? For nondirect care providers working in management and executive teams, are these traits a requirement? This book will explore the idea that leaders in healthcare administration are more effective at producing results and getting things done when they have what I call the leadership intangibles: humility, compassion, kindness, and generosity.

The idea that leaders can be humble and achieve great things isn’t a new one. If we look back to ancient history, we find some fascinating examples. Cyrus the Great was the founder of the world’s first empire and, by all accounts, a towering figure in the history of humankind. He is said to have built the Persian empire through kindness and care. “More important than the territory Cyrus conquered were his policies of tolerance and inclusion. . . . Cyrus recognized individual
differences and appreciated what diversity could bring to his empire. He tried to win over his enemies through trust and inclusion—an approach that must have seemed amazing at a time when the usual tools of conquest were destruction, massacre, and enslavement,” write Steve Forbes and John Prevas (2009, 44). Their noted book, Power, Ambition, Glory, explores the traits of great leaders of the ancient world and compares them to those of some contemporary business leaders.

Augustus, the great Roman emperor, was another humble historical leader. After the assassination of his great-uncle and adoptive father Julius Caesar, Augustus led Rome’s transformation from republic to empire by combining military might, institution building, and lawmaking. Eventually he became Rome’s sole ruler, laying the foundation for one of the most successful empires in history. Augustus was known for his personal humility, referring to himself as no more than Rome’s primus inter paribus, or “first among equals.” Despite being the undisputed leader of millions and the richest man in the ancient world, he kept his ego in check and listened to others (Forbes and Prevas 2009).

3

Let’s turn our attention back to the workplace. Many people will most likely recall an arrogant, abusive leader much more easily than a humble, compassionate one. We often refer to these leaders as “jerks” or “bullies.” Robert Sutton, a professor of management science and engineering at Stanford University, irreverently calls them assholes! In 2003, he used the term asshole at work in an article that appeared in the prestigious Harvard Business Review. Sutton admits that he considered using more proper terms such as jerk or bully but felt that they were watered down and censored variations that “simply did not have the same ring of authenticity or emotional appeal” (2007, 3). After the article received widespread attention, he wrote a book addressing the same topic by the title of The No Asshole Rule.
According to Sutton, there are ways to spot an asshole. First, after talking to him, the other person feels oppressed, humiliated, de-energized, and belittled. Second, an asshole typically aims his venom at people who are less powerful than himself. On any given day, he may use personal insults, invade others’ personal territory, initiate uninvited physical contact, and use verbal and nonverbal threats and intimidation. He also may insult others using sarcastic jokes and teasing, write withering e-mail flames, engage in public shaming or status degradation rituals, rudely interrupt others, use two-faced attacks, spray dirty looks, and treat others as if they’re invisible (Sutton 2007). There are many negative effects of having assholes in the workplace, including reduced job satisfaction and productivity and trouble concentrating at work, and their actions can lead to serious damage to others. Their actions can also cause mental and physical health problems such as difficulty sleeping, anxiety, feelings of worthlessness, chronic fatigue, irritability, anger, and depression. The people involved extend beyond the victims themselves to their coworkers, family members, or friends, who suffer from the ripple effects of the abuse.

But perhaps the most significant impact of jerks is on organizational performance. The costs of increased turnover, absenteeism, decreased commitment to work, distraction, and impaired individual performance are well documented in psychological studies. The Total Cost of Assholes or TCA (yes, someone made that up and took the time to measure it!) at one company was estimated to be about $160,000 per salesperson in terms of time spent by management to monitor, contain, and discipline assholes; turnover; overtime cost; anger management; and training, among other costs (Sutton 2007).

Unpleasant people are a problem at any level but are especially harmful when they’re in leadership positions. When people rise into positions of power, they tend to start acting in an abrasive way. They talk more, take what they want for themselves, disregard what other people say, ignore how their behavior affects others, and generally treat everyone with disdain and rudeness. It is human nature to act...
Imagine this experiment: A number of college students were divided into groups of three and were asked to discuss a long list of social issues (e.g., abortion, pollution). The researchers assigned one member of the group, at random, to be the leader who evaluated the recommendations of the other two. After 30 minutes, a plate of five cookies was brought to each group. The students who were assigned the power position were more likely to take a second cookie, chew with their mouths open, and get crumbs on their faces and on the table—all self-centered behaviors. So even in a short experiment, human beings become full of themselves as soon as they’re given any type of power over others (Sutton 2007).

Given how dangerous assholes can be, why are they tolerated in our organizations and culture? Sutton maintains that the unspoken standard in American business, medicine, sports, and academia is that “the more often you are right and the more often you win, the bigger a jerk you can be” (Sutton 2007, 55). If we’re honest, we have to admit that there are some advantages to being a jerk. Acting that way can sometimes makes you seem smarter than others and may help you obtain benefits at work. In an article titled “Brilliant But Cruel,” Professor Teresa Amabile studied people’s perception of positive and negative book reviews. She reports that people perceived negative reviewers as “more intelligent, competent, and expert than positive reviewers, even when the content of the positive review was independently judged as being of higher quality and greater forcefulness” (Amabile 1983, 146).

Many think that jerks are smarter or better than nice people. Reality television is full of examples that confirm Sutton’s point: Simon Cowell on American Idol, Piers Morgan on America’s Got Talent, and more recently, Kevin O’Leary (the ironically self-nicknamed “Mr. Wonderful”) on Shark Tank. When these judges make demeaning comments and poke fun at contestants, most people automatically assume that they must be really good at what they do. While we may be fascinated by jerks on television, however, very few of us would want to work for them in real life.
A few years ago, like millions of people around the world, I rushed to the bookstore to get my hands on Walter Isaacson’s biography of Steve Jobs. Like many others, I was mesmerized by the genius of Jobs, who almost single-handedly transformed personal computers, phones, mobile computers, music, and animation, and in the process, changed our lives forever.

As I dug deeper into Jobs’s life and career, however, I gradually became troubled by his behavior and poor treatment of others. Isaacson presented evidence that Jobs was a tyrant who threw frequent tantrums and regularly yelled at his employees. In meetings, it was a common occurrence for him to say, “You asshole, you never do anything right” (Isaacson 2011, 124). As I understood the extent of Jobs’s abuse, I started asking myself, Would he have been more successful if he had had better self-control and treated others in a more compassionate and kind way? Or would he have lost his mojo, so to speak, and become less successful? Six months after Jobs’s death, Isaacson addressed some of these concerns in an article about leadership style: “When I pressed him [Jobs] on whether he could have gotten the same results while being nicer, he said perhaps so. ‘But it’s not who I am,’ he said. ‘Maybe there’s a better way—a gentlemen’s club where we all wear ties and speak in this Brahmin language and velvet code words—but I don’t know that way, because I am middle-class from California’” (Isaacson 2012, 99).

How do we make sense of Jobs’s example? I believe that Steve Jobs is the exception, rather than the rule. His behavior was tolerated, and many were loyal to him because they saw his passion for what he did, as well as his intelligence, creativity, and perfectionism. But that does not give the rest of us a license to abuse and mistreat others. This fact is of special importance for the many young people who consider Jobs a role model, especially those who think to themselves, “If Steve Jobs was a jerk and he was one of the most successful leaders in one of the most successful companies in
the world, if I act like him, maybe I’ll be successful too” (Williams 2015). Just because Steve Jobs abused people and was outrageously successful doesn’t mean that other hopefuls can act the same way.

Another way to look at this issue is to admit that some intimidation and toughness can be beneficial in the workplace, especially when difficult changes are needed and people aren’t ready to embrace them. Roderick Kramer, an experimental social psychologist and professor of organizational behavior at Stanford, calls Steve Jobs-type leaders the “great intimidators” (Kramer 2006, 2). These are the leaders who don’t shy away from conflict and confrontation. Kramer suggests that a list of great intimators would read a bit like a business leadership hall of fame: Sandy Weill, Rupert Murdoch, Andy Grove, Carly Fiorina, Larry Ellison, and Steve Jobs.

But the great intimators, according to Kramer, aren’t bullies who humiliate others to make themselves look good. Rather than being driven by their egos, these leaders are driven by vision. They’re motivated to remove any obstacles, including human ones, that may stand in their way. The secret to their success is their political intelligence, which allows them to enact changes in the face of resistance and inertia (Kramer 2006). They appreciate the power of fear and anxiety, unashamedly leverage other people’s weaknesses and insecurities, and use intimidation and hard power to exploit the anxieties they detect. Such leaders are able to intimidate and vanquish their rivals, bring clueless and lazy people to their senses, and motivate fear-driven performance and perfectionism. It isn’t pretty, Kramer argues, but it works.

Michael C. Zucker is the former senior vice president and chief development officer at Baptist Health System in San Antonio, Texas, where he oversaw strategy, growth, and development for seven years. He has served in senior leadership roles with many
healthcare organizations in a successful career spanning more than 25 years. Recently, he left Baptist Health System and cofounded Ranger Health.

I’ve known Mike for a while, and we regularly get together to catch up. When I was doing research for this book, I met with him for lunch at his favorite restaurant in San Antonio. When I explained to him what I was working on, he was intrigued by the topic and quick to offer his personal observations.

My leadership style is very direct, perhaps similar to the well-known leadership styles of Jack Welch or Steve Jobs. I have witnessed an increasing trend among leaders in all levels who are not held accountable for their performance. I have experienced leaders that would rather not address the issues of weak performance at the expense of improving the organization’s performance. These managers and leaders prefer to take the easier road of not addressing individual performance, perhaps due to someone being very tenured or well liked, or because they have no one to immediately backfill a leadership void that would be created. Regardless, this is a disservice to the organization, its employees, and customers. I would characterize this leadership style as leading by emotion. Having a balance of emotion and compassion in one’s leadership style are certainly good characteristics, but not at the expense of accountability. In our industry, some leaders have placed so much emphasis on leading with compassion that it has come at the expense of being able to drive change quickly. (Zucker 2014)

Mike’s leadership style can be characterized as direct and results oriented. Those who have worked with him say that he’s not big on small talk and that he expects preparation and performance.

Mike rightly points out that this issue isn’t either/or—that there is a continuum of compassion and kindness along which people
operate. For example, Mike has served for many years as a preceptor for healthcare administration graduate students. He describes his approach with young residents as caring but not compassionate. “My style with the students is one of 'hard love.' I don’t shower the administrative residents with constant and positive affirmation. I will acknowledge a job well done when it is earned. Likewise, I will spend 30 minutes with them after a meeting to discuss the learning opportunities. I also expect few mistakes, well-written reports, and quality work products, because we are making decisions based on the residents’ work. I truly care about their education and professional growth and will challenge them to perform, as it is part of the learning experience” (Zucker 2014).

Hurley Smith is one of Mike’s previous administrative residents, having worked with him for a whole year on strategic and financial projects. During that time, Hurley was given access to all meetings and was allowed to get involved in a variety of different groups and committees. Mike didn’t hold Hurley’s hand, and he rarely praised him for doing what was expected. But Hurley recalls one special day:

One afternoon, I was working on my desk outside of Mike’s office and the top button on my jacket fell off, just before a big presentation. Panicked, I tried to stitch the button back. Mike saw me struggling with the string and needle. He came over and asked, “What the heck are you doing?” I explained the situation to him. He inquired, “How long have you had this jacket?” I told him that I’ve had it since high school. I was a poor graduate student at the time; I didn’t have a large wardrobe. He said, “Hurley, you have outgrown this jacket. You can’t wear this to the meeting today.” So I went to the meeting and did the presentation without the jacket.

After the meeting, Mike asked me to go have a drink with him. Once at the bar, he didn’t waste any time on small talk, he went straight to business—it was so hard to hear. He said that I was spending way too much time
working on my computer at my desk and not enough time going out and learning things in the hospitals. That was one of the most intense, true coaching sessions in my life. Afterwards, he took me across the street to Jos. A. Bank and bought me a suit for $350. He said: “Now you look like you mean business.” That is when I realized that, in his own way, Mike really cared about me. I will never forget that. (Smith 2016)

6

I hope that by now you’re starting to realize that the issue of leader behavior and its effect on performance isn’t as black and white as some might portray it. You can be compassionate and kind and also be a high performer. You can be intimidating and rude and be very successful. You can also be nice and caring and get nothing done, just as you can be a jerk and drive your organization into the ground. Like any other important aspect of leadership, there are no easy answers. There are no step-by-step manuals that you can follow to be more successful. As cliché as it might sound, *it depends*. It depends on your personality, your upbringing, the type of people you’re leading, the kind of organization you work in, and the situation you’re facing, among many other factors.

For instance, there is evidence that one’s leadership style isn’t stable over time, but rather varies from day to day. In other words, the same leader can be abusive one day and kind another. Leaders who often act like jerks may still have days in which they’re compassionate and kind, and leaders who are humble and caring may have days in which they hurl insults at others (Barnes et al. 2015).

Evidence also exists that different leadership styles may be more effective depending on the followers’ personal traits. For example, people who are high on agreeableness are generally courteous to others, prefer cooperation over competition, and are typically thoughtful and considerate. On the other hand, those low on agreeableness tend
to get into arguments, are often skeptical of others’ intentions, and are cynical and confrontational. In a recent study of college students in the Netherlands, participants worked collaboratively on a simulation exercise. After they finished the task, they received feedback on how they could have improved their performance from a team leader (an actor) via video streaming. In the first instance, the leader looked cheerful, spoke with an enthusiastic and upbeat tone of voice, and smiled frequently. In the second instance, the leader frowned a lot, spoke with an angry and irritable tone of voice, clenched his fists, and looked stern. The same message was delivered in both cases, with the leader expressing either happiness or anger through his facial expressions, vocal intonation, and bodily postures. The study results showed that followers who scored low on agreeableness performed better when the leader expressed anger rather than happiness. In contrast, highly agreeable followers performed better when the leader was cheerful and energetic. This result suggests that effective leaders can match their leadership style and emotional expressions to those of their followers (Van Kleef et al. 2010).

Also important to note is that a certain leadership style may work well in one situation but backfire in another. When the organization is facing highly volatile and risky conditions, a loud and rambunctious leader may do better than a humble consensus builder. “If we think of leadership styles as running along a continuum from very humble to dangerously brash and overconfident, it might be that different kinds of leadership styles operate better in some business environments than in others,” notes John Banja, a medical ethicist at Emory University (Banja 2015, 52). Some historians view Winston Churchill’s brash and sometimes arrogant style, for example, as one of the main reasons behind the Allied victory in World War II. However, immediately after the war ended, that style was less appreciated, and Churchill and his party were voted out of office.

Another factor of success rarely addressed in leadership books and studies is pure luck. Humble leaders attribute most of their achievements to external factors such as others’ contributions, good fortune, and serendipity. John Hornbeak, the retired CEO
of Methodist Health System in San Antonio, is one of those leaders who are always hesitant to take credit for organizational successes. He notes that “luck is understudied in leadership. Sometimes, we’re successful because we are in the right place at the right time. And other times, we are successful because the competition screwed up, or one of their high-admitting doctors just fell into our lap” (Hornbeak 2014).

The studies and opinions highlighted in the previous sections suggest that context and luck can play an important role in affecting leadership effectiveness. But overall, the evidence shows that in most situations and in most organizations, the leadership intangibles of humility, compassion, kindness, and generosity can help leaders achieve more than intimidation and fear in the long run. In workplaces with cultures based on compassion rather than fear, talented individuals share their ideas more freely and dysfunctional internal competition is reduced. As a result, people tend to stick around, and turnover cost is lower.

The notion that a leader’s style can become a long-term competitive advantage for her individual employees, team, and organization is one that Heidi Pandya strongly believes in. Heidi obtained her master’s degree in healthcare administration in 2005 and went on to have a successful career in the competitive field of management consulting. Her style is “big on communicating, on interpersonal skills with my team and my clients.” She wants others to enjoy coming to work and being around her, which makes them comfortable admitting their mistakes and talking about their problems with her. “They know that when they tell me about a problem, my first reaction is to understand and to find a solution, not to get frustrated or angry at them,” she explains. While that style is compatible with Heidi’s personality, it also allows her to achieve results in the long run. “I do that because this is who I am, but also because I want to
he says (Pandya 2016).

Heidi has been a preceptor and mentor for many young residents and interns at a large global professional services firm. Despite her young age, they endearingly call her their “mother.” Marisa Stansberry, one of the young consultants who were mentored by Heidi, explains how Heidi treated her:

I always appreciated that Heidi would call me and check in on me, even when I wasn’t staffed on a project with her. She always asked me what she could do to help me. I would obviously have never taken her up on that, because no matter how swamped I was, I knew she had it worse, but it meant the world to me that she would ask. She never made me feel like she is too important or high up the food chain to roll her sleeves up and work, and that made me want to work even harder for her.

Heidi led her team by example by holding herself to high standards and getting things done on time. When the team achieved its goals, she always gave them credit: “If we had to work until 3am to get something done for a partner, she mentioned us by name to that partner the next day to give us credit. On group calls, she always said all the credit goes to her team and remembered what each one of us contributed specifically to the project” (Stansberry 2016).

When leaders behave in positive ways, good things happen in organizations. In a study of 800 employees in 18 organizations across different sectors, scholars Kim Cameron, David Bright, and Arran Caza (2004) found that recently downsized organizations did better when their leaders were virtuous. Virtuousness means that leaders acted with kindness, compassion, forgiveness, and gratitude. This finding is especially important because after downsizing, employees typically have negative perceptions of their organizations. These perceptions, demonstrated by grudge holding, hostility, and retribution seeking, can often lead to performance deterioration. But when
leaders are virtuous, the organization is able to keep its employees and maintain its innovation and profitability. Cameron uses the term *positive leadership*, which he describes as promoting virtuous behaviors and allowing people to thrive at work while insisting on strict performance standards (Cameron 2012, x).

Sir Alex Ferguson is the most successful coach in the history of British soccer, if not all of international soccer. Between 1986 and 2013, he guided his team, Manchester United, to no fewer than 38 local and international trophies. He was knighted by the queen of England in 1999 for his role in guiding his team to a historic *treble* (winning the English League, the English Cup, and the European Champions League in one season), an unprecedented feat at the time. He had the ability to combine youthful players with experienced players, build a winning team, and restart the process every five to six years, when the team would reach the end of its performance cycle (BBC News 1999).

Any casual fan would describe Ferguson as a fierce, ruthless coach who stopped at nothing in order to win. When his players underperformed, he gave them the infamous “hairdryer” treatment at halftime: He would single out one or two players who made a mistake or played particularly poorly, standing directly in front of them in the middle of the locker room. He would shout and scream in their faces for 10 to 15 minutes, often questioning whether they deserved to play for Manchester United. When he noticed that a player’s form had dipped because of injury or age, or that a player was questioning his authority in public, he ruthlessly cut them from the club altogether (Sportsmail Daily Reporter 2012).

His relationship with reporters wasn’t any friendlier. When the BBC aired a documentary in 2004 that made allegations about Ferguson’s son, he imposed a seven-year ban on all BBC reporters, refusing to talk to them or to appear on any BBC program.
Ferguson also spared no criticism for rival coaches. For example, he had an especially tense relationship with the French manager of Arsenal, Arsene Wenger. After an especially fierce Manchester United–Arsenal battle that ended with a player for the rival team throwing pizza at him in the tunnel after the game, Ferguson called Wenger a “disgrace” (Guardian 2011).

But underneath that famous tough-guy facade, Ferguson showed glimpses of compassion and kindness that took many people by surprise. Cristiano Ronaldo, one of the best players in the world and a current icon of the game, was recruited by Ferguson to play for Manchester United when he was only 18 years old. He often talks about the special bond that he had with Ferguson. One day, before an especially important game, Ronaldo’s father fell sick. So Ronaldo went to talk to Ferguson. He described (in his then-broken English) what happened:

> When my daddy was sick in London, and he was in hospital very bad in a coma, I had a conversation with him [Ferguson] and I said: “Boss, I don’t feel good.” We are in a key moment in the Champions League, and I said I don’t feel good and I wanna see my dad. He said: “Cristiano—you wanna go one day, two days, one week? You can go. I’m going to miss you here because you are important, but your daddy is the [priority].” When he told me that, I feel like this guy is unbelievable. He the father of football for me. (Parthasarathi 2008)

Given Ronaldo’s immense talent and his importance to the team, it would have been understandable if Ferguson had insisted that he stay with the team and play. Instead, he demonstrated great compassion by allowing the young superstar to be with his family.

Ferguson’s compassion didn’t just apply to his best players, on whom he depended for success. Many describe the special bond that he had with the “little people” at Manchester United: those who did the laundry, maintained the lawn, or worked in the cafeteria.
Ferguson paid special attention to them, going out of his way to show his appreciation for their work. For him, these were the unsung heroes of Manchester United, who often stayed at the club longer than anyone else. Most of them took the bus to come serve the super-rich players who paraded to the training grounds in their Porsches and Ferraris. Given his humble origins growing up as the son of a shipbuilder in the impoverished town of Govan in Scotland, it was easy for Ferguson to feel an affinity with those individuals. He believes that “kindness is a universal language regardless of age, nationality, or religion” (Ferguson 2011).

In his recent book *Leading*, Ferguson explains the secret to his long-standing success: “You don’t get the best out of people by hitting them with an iron rod. You do so by gaining their respect, getting them accustomed to triumphs, and convincing them that they are capable of improving their performance. I cannot think of any manager who succeeded for any length of time by presiding over a reign of terror. It turns out that the two most powerful words in the English language are ‘well done.’ Much of leadership is about extracting that extra 5 percent of performance that individuals did not know they possessed” (Ferguson and Moritz 2015, 118). After retiring from coaching in 2013, Ferguson has been teaching a leadership course at Harvard Business School, explaining how he combined compassion and ruthlessness to lead his high-performing teams to numerous successes over the years.

Let’s circle back to Rebecca, the nurse. After working for ten years in nursing, she went back to school to get a master’s degree in healthcare administration. A few years after she graduated, I asked her to think back about her nursing philosophy and how it relates to her new role in administration. She noted, “What my nursing philosophy meant is that a nurse has to have compassion and kindness, but that is not enough by itself. It should be coupled with competency and technical skills. You can’t have a compassionate nurse that doesn’t know how to
start an IV or can’t make accurate clinical decisions. The same applies for leaders—they have to be nice, but they also have to hold people to a standard. You care about your people but you don’t want to be seen as lenient. The successful leader has to be kind and respected” (Ivatury 2016). The bedrock argument of this book is the following: Effective leaders are admired for their humility, compassion, kindness, and generosity and are respected for their ambition, toughness, determination, and competence. They’re humbitious.

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