

Episode 2 Leadership Guide

April 22, 2026

Leadership Impact: Leadership for the 21st Century

Inspiration:

Exceptional leaders lead strategically. They lead with vision, foresight, and a future focus. Exceptional leaders can change the world. *Exceptional leaders are difference makers.*

Key takeaways:

- Sears, Roebuck & Co, once a 100-year-old mail-order giant and United States' largest retailer, ended mail-order sales just as the Internet was becoming public to focus on increasing retail competition.
- One could argue that Sears was perfectly positioned to become what Amazon is today but about 5 years sooner.
- But the company's lack of adaptability, short-sighted and myopic thinking gave it limited options and an unclear view of the future, which not only led to a missed opportunity but also lost its competitive advantages to new retail competition.
- Sears, and many organizations like it, failed to adapt because they were deeply entrenched in management science practices and narrow leadership concepts that did not prepare them for rapid and continuous change, increasing complexity, and growing competition.
- In contrast to Sears, we can learn much from those long-standing companies that did successfully adapt to the Internet and continue to do well today.
- Unfortunately, this archaic thinking still hampers organizations today.
- We need to fully understand leadership's full scope and magnitude in today's world and not the last century so that we can reimagine our leadership approach to meet 21st century challenges.

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Difference Makers Leadership Podcast focuses on developing leaders who make a positive difference in the lives of people, organizations, and communities. Its short format provides thought provoking insights and strategies for busy leaders. In contrast to the task-centered, authoritarian, and command and control leadership that dominates today's business, military commands, and government agencies, *Difference Makers: A Leadership Podcast* advocates for positive, human-centered leadership that take the form of servant, transformational, and transforming leadership approaches that help you achieve leadership excellence. Each episode will equip you with expert insights, strategies, methods, and actions to not only be more productive and successful, but also help you grow toward your full human potential and increase your leadership capacity.

Key Leadership Lesson:

1. To reimagine leadership for the 21st century, we need to change the focus from short-term profits and gains to long-term success and survivability by maintaining a future focus and understanding what is going on in the strategic environment, our industry, and our organization. This includes:
 - (1) Having a future orientation that accepts rapid and continuous change and increasing complexity or part of doing business.
 - (2) Increasing strategic awareness through vigilance and information continuous gathering to facilitate organizational learning, not just at the senior leader level, but across the organization.
 - (3) Ensuring we create the conditions to create organizational adaptability that allows us to actionize organizational learning.

Leadership Action:

Look at the world around you and ask yourself what is really going on at both a deeper level and a broad strategic level. Consider the social, geopolitical, and economic forces, environmental factors, emerging technologies. How are they going to affect you, your organization, your industry, your community, and the greater society we share?

Reflection Questions:

Considering your knowledge and an understanding of the strategic environment:

1. How confident are you that you understand what is taking place and what it means?
2. What information gaps, biases, or faulty assumptions do you have that might put you in the same position as Sears, Roebuck & Co's leadership in 1993?
3. Where do you need more information and how are you going to get it?
4. Is your organization able to learn and adapt to today's ever-changing environment?

Biography: Dr. Timothy S. McWilliams is an award-winning talent development professional and strategic advisor with more than 40 years of civilian, military, government, and ministry leadership experience, 30+ years of experience managing programs and projects, and more than decade managing talent and leader development programs. He obtained a doctorate in Strategic Leadership from Regent University after serving more than 30 years in the U. S. Marine Corps and U. S. Marine Corps reserve. Following September 11, 2001, Tim oversaw major logistics operations, and later field history collection operations, in CONUS, Iraq, Kuwait, and Afghanistan. Previously he was engaged as a marketing and strategic communication professional overseeing corporate advertising and promotion campaigns and advising business leaders. Before launching his own leader development company and *Difference Makers: A Leadership Podcast*, he designed, updated, and managed important DoD civilian leader development programs. Tim is an author, speaker, and the founder and CEO of Timothy S. McWilliams Leadership and Leader Development, LLC, which does business under the *Timotheos Leadership* and *STRATEGIAN Leadership and Communication* brands.