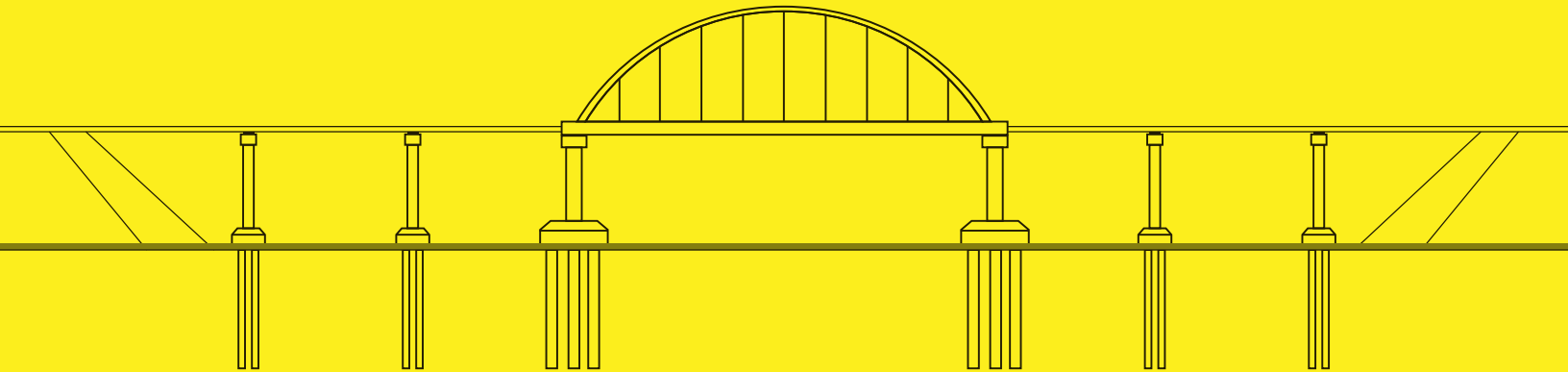


TAKING CHARGE of CHANGE

Discussion Guide



How Rebuilders Solve Hard Problems

Paul
Shoemaker

A Message from the Author

Welcome! Thanks for deciding to read *Taking Charge of Change*. I'm excited to have each and every one of you join me in my journey to get to know, deconstruct, and learn from these amazing leaders for the 2020s whom I call Rebuilders.

The purpose of this guide is to help you enrich your reading experience and better digest the book's stories and insights—with the prospect of applying these to your life, career, and community in meaningful ways. Whether you are reading *Taking Charge of Change* as an individual or with a group, I hope you'll reflect on the questions posed here, form a better understanding of how we got to where we are today and what confronts us in the decade ahead, and begin discerning how you can implement the traits of Rebuilders in your own work and teams. The challenges ahead of us are massive...but so are the opportunities—if the right leaders show up. I hope this guide will be your stepping-stone to practical application.

I'm always interested to hear your reactions to the book as well as your stories of leadership for the 2020s. So please head over to my website [Paul Shoemaker.org](http://PaulShoemaker.org) or feel free to reach out by email—shoe@paulshoemaker.org—to continue the conversation. (And by all means, please post a review on [LinkedIn.com](https://www.linkedin.com), [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com), or your favorite social media or bookselling site—that's great way to share your thoughts with me and the world.) If you'd like to extend the experience further, consider my Rebuilders podcast, where I interview leaders and future thinkers like those profiled in the book: www.paulshoemaker.org/podcast. I also speak and consult for businesses, nonprofits, civic organizations, and NGOs, so if you have a particular challenge, need, research idea, or prototype for rebuilding your company or community that you want to discuss, don't hesitate to get in touch: <https://www.paulshoemaker.org/consulting>

Read. Reflect. Discuss. Enjoy. And join us in creating a Decade of Rebuilders.

—Paul

[www.Paul Shoemaker.org](http://www.PaulShoemaker.org)

Author of *Taking Charge of Change: How Rebuilders Solve Hard Problems*
and *Can't Not Do: The Compelling Social Drive that Changes Our World*.

Contact: <https://www.paulshoemaker.org/contact-paul>

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How to Use This Guide

This guide is designed to help you un-pack the messages and insight in *Taking Charge of Change* through reflection and discussion. Its purpose is to help you maximize the book's impact and aid implementation in your life and leadership.

Use as an Individual

Individual readers are encouraged to use the questions as starting points for self-reflection. If you enjoy journaling, consider writing down your answers. If you have a mentor, executive coach, life coach, or trusted friend whom you use as a sounding board, consider taking the questions you find meaningful into your conversations with them.

Use with Groups

Adults tend to learn more deeply through meaningful conversations on a topic. By using this resource with your group, you facilitate those meaningful conversations for yourself and others or maybe for the next project at work. These discussions can take many forms—from a long-established book club or reading circle to an informal brown-bag lunch discussion at your workplace to an online Zoom group with friends and colleagues. Whatever the nature of your group, here're some helpful hints to improve your experience.

Prior to Starting Your Group Session:

Establish ground rules at the outset. A few common ones that promote healthy, positive discussion are: Mutual respect. Keep what's shared private. Remember there is no one "right answer"; there are many right answers. In all, set the tone and model the behavior you wish to see.

This guide is structured to correspond to the book's five Parts—for five intended sessions. But proceed as needed; you can discuss the book all at one time, for instance, or go chapter by chapter. Clarify well in advance of your session the reading selection to be discussed.

If you are meeting online, allow some time at the outset for simple social interaction and getting into the swing of conversation. If you're meeting in a physical location, don't overlook subtle things that set the mood, such as how you arrange the space. For example, chairs set in circles or squares typically generate more equitable type of discussion than classroom-seating with a moderator at the head of the room.

Tips for Great Discussion:

- Don't feel obliged to answer every question. Select ones that will resonate with your group.
- Call on and respond to participants by name.
- Be intentional about including the introverts in your group. Introverts often have plenty of value to share, they simply need to be invited into the conversation by the moderator and given space to speak. Ask them by name for their thoughts on a question.
- Use eye contact and thank respondents for their contributions.

- Avoid letting one question or argument overwhelm an entire session. Know when to pull the plug. Typically, if most of the group are not actively engaged in the discussion but two people are going back and forth repeatedly with escalation, that's a sign to move on.
- Don't cut off a participant harshly or dismiss their viewpoint—that can shut down a person for the remainder of your meeting(s). In cases where a discussion is devolving into an argument, tactfully let each person know that you have appreciated the lively discussion, but there are additional worthy topics to get to and you welcome hearing their thoughts on those as well. Then pose a new question, addressing it first to a different participant.
- Have an answer ready yourself to a starter question for each session. If your group is the type that needs warming up, this kind of modeling is often all it takes before discussion takes off. It's also a good idea to begin a group's first session with a general, easy question.
- If you aren't gaining traction with a particular question, move on. Don't force it. And never make a participant feel he or she has to answer a certain question.
- There is wisdom in every community. Take advantage of this. Ask the group what interested them most in the reading and why. Ask them what questions they have and would like to pose to the group. The best discussion topics often come from within the group itself.
- Be respectful. And have fun.



Introduction & Our Rebuilders

PART 1

*“I didn’t set out to write a leadership book. I started by researching effective economic and social change. I wanted to identify what enabled certain organizations or initiatives to achieve great success on social issues while others floundered, even if trying to address the same issue. I was originally looking for best practices or model solutions. As I studied this question, I began noticing that the stellar cases were led by people who approached leadership **very intentionally**. And they happen to possess some strikingly similar traits. Five key traits, in fact. And although I looked for some other ‘secret sauce’—like a specific organizational structure or a certain approach being applied—I kept coming back to the realization that the most important factor to success was this emerging type of leadership that is uniquely poised to meet the challenges we’re facing today. Leadership as a key lever isn’t a new idea, but these leaders are unique—especially for the times we are living in.... This wasn’t the book I **planned** to write—it was the book in the end I **had** to write.”*

— Paul Shoemaker

Questions

1. Generally speaking, what are your thoughts, hopes, or fears about leadership in the 2020s?
2. This book is aimed at people who want to create change on an economic, civic, or social issue—whether they’re operating in the nonprofit, public, or private sector. What’s an issue you are passionate about? Share why with the group.
3. Today many for-profit CEOs and executives say that part of their job today is to be a social impact leader. What’s your reaction to this? Where do you see business leaders doing a good job and where do you see them falling short?
4. How intentionally do you think about your own leadership? How has this exhibited itself or failed to exhibit itself in your life and work?
5. The main analogy of the book is of bridges, both deteriorating U.S. bridges in urgent need of repair and the commitment and resources required to rebuild them. The author relates this to the “social, economic, and health structures underlying American civil society” that are today “in a more critical condition than they have been in decades” (Introduction x–xi). Do you agree that foundations, structures, and social agreements upholding American businesses and communities need rebuilding—and if so, to what degree of urgency?



Rebuilder Trish Millines

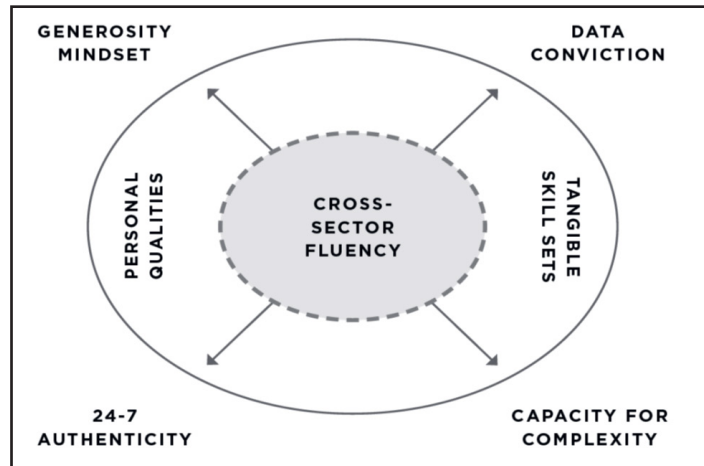


Figure I.1 Diagram of the Five Vital Traits

Questions (continued)



Rebuilder Dan Cardinali

6. Thinking about the diagram of the five vital traits of Rebuilders and how they work together (Figure I.1), which area are you most interested to learn about and why? How do you think you might apply that trait more fully to be effective as a leader?
7. What’s your reaction to Dan Cardinali’s “set of clear values” for getting to “the simplicity on the other side of complexity” given on page 9? Do you have initial thoughts on what your 3–5 guiding values might be?
8. The author states that his use of the term “Rebuilders” is forward thinking and prospective, not retrospective. What do you find attractive or unattractive about the concept of “rebuilding” as an essential value for the 2020s and successful leaders being “Rebuilders” in the decade ahead?



Why Rebuilders Matter for the 2020s chapters 1–4



“Economic, social, and health inequities in this country—after being on a generally positive or at least flat trajectory for decades—have accelerated in the past twenty years. And 2020, as we all know, just accentuated those inequities even more severely and made the mountain for leaders to climb that much steeper. So this context is making solving social problems much harder. It’s making leadership much harder. And it’s raising the stakes for leadership that much more. If we’re going to come out of this decade better than we came in, leaders are going to have to show up BIG—and in lots of different places.”

— Paul Shoemaker

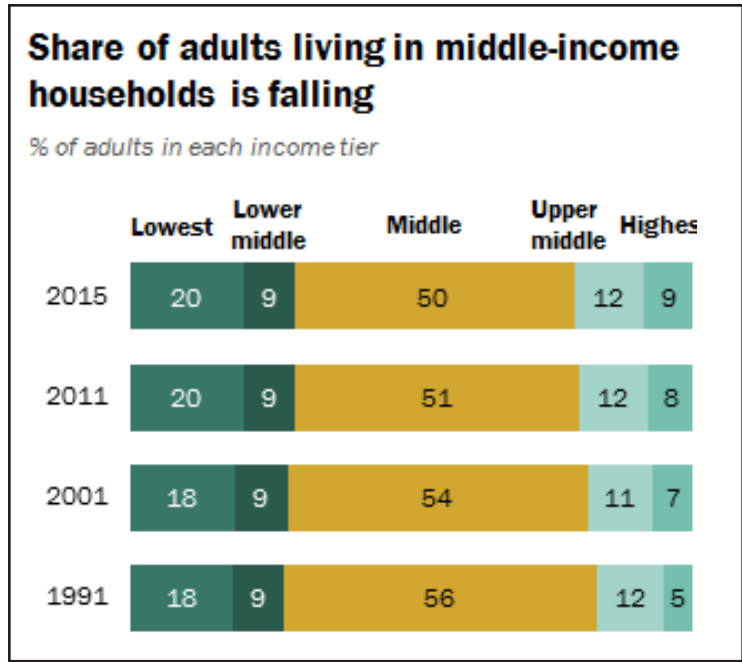
Questions

1. In Part Two the author shows us how the “five megachallenges” put forth in the Introduction (pg. xiv) are supported by historical and empirical evidence. What data in Chapters 1 or 2 surprised or concerned you the most?

MEGACHALLENGE	REBUILDER VITAL TRAIT
Unequal access to technology and hyper-media as amplifiers	24-7 Authenticity
Breadth & depth of challenges greatest in seventy-five years	Complexity Capacity
Less connected and more siloed than perhaps ever been	Generosity Mindset
Slowing, less certain, more unequal progress	Data Conviction
Blurring lines between private, nonprofit, and public sectors	Cross-Sector Fluency

Diagram of the Five Megachallenges

2. In the past few years, how have you witnessed inequality, silos, and division affecting your workplace, industry, or the places where you volunteer your time?
3. One of Paul’s observations was this: he had seen and read about specific inequalities, but until he looked at the whole, collective picture together, he didn’t fully grasp how much we’ve gone in the wrong direction over the last generation. Do you agree or disagree with that conclusion?



Source: Pew Research Center, 2015.

“Where We Are”: Share of Adults Living in Middle-Income Households

Questions (continued)



Rebuilder Doug Baldwin



Rebuilder David Risher

4. “All this tech sounded great in the 90s...now we’re seeing it’s kind of a mixed bag.” Consider this author statement and the list of related questions about the future of technology on page 52. Discuss in what ways, if any, future tech advancements may need to be paired with responsible, tempering action on the part of companies, society, and end-users.
5. Do you agree that America is *less* connected and *more* siloed than ever?
6. In what ways have you experienced or seen technology, hyper-siloed media (and COVID in 2020-21) being amplifiers of the inequities and division that we face today?
7. Share an example of how you or another leader you admire have responded to the growing economic inequities in American workplaces and society.
8. Share an example of how you or another leader you admire have responded to the growing silos within our communities and organizations.
9. In Rebuilder David Risher’s story about Worldreader and cross-sector fluency, the author shares his view of “the single most important lesson” that Risher learned from the private sector and leveraged in the nonprofit sector—and vice versa, nonprofit to private—to great success (pages 63 – 64). What is one approach or tenant common to any of the three sectors—nonprofit, private, or public—that you wish to see applied more readily to another sector?



The Five Vital Traits

chapters 5–9

3

PART

“Some principles of leadership are timeless—but we also need to update our thinking and lens on what makes great leaders today and what will make them great Rebuilders for the 2020s. This decade’s megachallenges are demanding that certain traits—both personal qualities and tangible skill sets—come to the fore more powerfully in our leaders than ever. We NEED to be talking about these traits. We need to understand the interlinked ways in which they operate and why they’re vital to bringing about real, substantive, positive change in an organization or system now. They’re like muscles that we need to be helping each other develop.”

— Paul Shoemaker

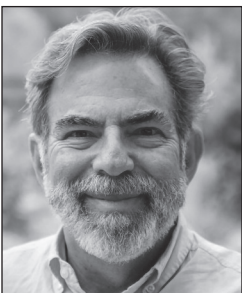
Questions

24-7 Authenticity

1. *24-7 Authenticity* “sits at the intersection of radical transparency and media-as-amplifier. You *need* to be authentic and open before you *have* to be. It’s not as if it’s optional or variable in today’s world” (page 75). What do you think about this statement? Do you agree? Disagree? If possible, cite recent examples to support your view.
2. *24-7 Authenticity* implies a proactive quality. As we see from Rebuilder Michael McAfee’s story (pages 73–75), it’s not about just being responsively authentic, and it means more than merely running-in-place because that’s become the comfortable thing to do. What are some ways you could be leaning in right now and pushing the edge of your comfort zone of authenticity?
3. Have you found yourself in a situation where your own authenticity, integrity, or honesty was particularly challenged? How did you navigate?
4. What are your thoughts on McAfee’s simple internal checklist for holding himself to high standards of accountability (page 75) and the words of Rebuilder Andy Lipkis’s internal compass for being authentic (page 81)? Do you have a set of personal principles or other intentional means that guide your authenticity?
5. This book is also very much for “organization-less leaders,” a term used by Rebuilder Richard Woo (page 83). Woo and the author mean that the leaders who matter more now are not always at the top or even inside an organization; they are going to show up in different places and ways than we are used to. Do you see yourself as an organization-less leader in some aspect of your life? How can the concepts in this book help you to be more effective at leading without the power of a title?
6. What is one personal takeaway from the list at the chapter’s end of “Ten Things We Know about 24-7 Authenticity Leaders for the Future” (pages 89–90)?



Rebuilder Michael
McAfee



Rebuilder Andy
Lipkis



Rebuilder Richard
Woo

Questions (continued)

Complexity Capacity

7. *Complexity Capacity* involves not only taking in enormous variables at play, but also the ability to interpret and communicate these, yielding clear courses of action. How have you had to display a capacity for complexity recently, especially now in a (hopefully) post-Covid world?
8. *Complexity Capacity* requires using both sides of your brain—the objective/logical/analytical one and the intuitive/emotional/creative one. Share an example of how you as a leader are being challenged right now to process increasingly abundant and complex information in either mode (or both) to make headway on change?
9. One aid to *Complexity Capacity* is “active listening,” as introduced on page 94 and modeled in Rebuilder Erica Valliant’s story (pages 95–97). Active listening requires maintaining a state of openness and attentiveness while listening, to take in the totality of what’s being communicated. Share an experience where someone has listened to or failed to listen to you in a way that correspondingly empowered or derailed a change you were working toward?
10. Another Rebuilder, Sudha Nandagopal (pages 101–103), was profiled at being effective as both a “bridge builder” and “flag waver.” Do those concepts seem relevant to the work you do and, if so, how do you see yourself?
11. Does your team, organization, or community currently have enough people with a capacity for complexity at the decision-making table? Do you have the right mix of people for the “complex, multivariate, hard-to-define, multistakeholder, big, gnarly problem” you’re trying to solve?
12. What is your top takeaway from the list at the chapter’s end of “Eight Things We Know about Capacity for Complexity Leaders for the Future” (pages 106–107)?

Generosity Mindset

13. Discuss some differences between and examples of an authentic Generosity Mindset verses “being nicey-nice or polite” (page 112).
14. Rebuilder Cecilia Gutierrez’s story proffers using generosity mindset as strategy (pages 110–112). What’s your reaction to a Generosity Mindset as a “strategic mindset”? How might this get to right conclusions easier, action steps faster, and stuff done more competently?
15. As Rebuilder Maya Enista Smith likes to say, “If you are more fortunate than others, it’s better to build a longer table than a taller fence.” In this increasingly unequal and siloed world, where in your leadership can you be building more, much longer tables for others?
16. Apryle Brodie (page 123) approaches her work as a leader with four core principles always in mind. How might her principles and that mindset possibly inform your work and leadership style?
17. Share a main takeaway from the list at the chapter’s end of “Seven Things We Know about the Generosity Mindset in Leaders for the Future” (pages 124–125)?

Data Conviction

18. Like Rebuilder Jeff Edmondson’s story (pages 128–131), give your own example of a time when clear, relevant data has “cut through the dissonance” of a group resisting change or through silos and confusion to align people on the outcomes of change?



Rebuilder Erica Valliant



Rebuilder Maya Enista Smith



Rebuilder Jeff Edmondson

Questions (continued)

19. The author says a primary function of *Data Conviction* in leaders of social or civic change is “to find the best replacement, or create effective proxies, for a bottom-line and paying customer” (page 132). Share what metrics for these replacements or proxies an organization, cause, stakeholders, or community you care about uses to measure success. Are these sufficient?
20. Which of the recommended six approaches to data (pages 134–136) do you or your team need to improve on and why?
21. In both Nicolette Statons’ and Bi Vuong’s profiles, there is explicit mention of the public sector being more open and transparent with all their data. Have you noticed that shift in your community and what effects do you think it can have?
22. Rebuilder Jennifer Park’s list of how data is used to lead includes “Data empowers failure” (page 140). What do you think about the idea of using data as a lever to turn what’s often seen only as a negative (failure) into a positive (narrative of a learning experience that has clarified the path ahead)?



Rebuilder Jennifer Park

23. What is your personal takeaway from the list at the chapter’s end of “Eight Things about Data Conviction in Our Leaders for the Future” (pages 141–142)?

Cross-Sector Fluency

24. If you have some *Cross-Sector Fluency* from having operated in more than one sector, reflect and share with the group an example of a lesson, practice, mindset, or advantage you took from one sector and used successfully in another.
25. The author highlights many, recent, private sector CEOs advocating for centering for-profit companies around a social purpose and cites Michael Porter’s writing that “business profits from solving social problems” and “there’s no trade-off between social progress and economic efficiency in any fundamental sense” (page 155). Do you agree, distrust, or feel neutral about such statements?
26. If you are in a private sector career currently, how much of Heather Redman’s strategies and approach make sense to you and might help you be more effective, not just in other sectors, but in your current career, too?
27. In the spirit of Rebuilders Josh Becker’s and Michael Nutter’s stories (pages 159–163), can you see yourself taking a more civically active stance in the decade ahead? What about possibly running for office?



Rebuilder Heather Redman

28. What is your top takeaway from the list at the chapter’s end of “Five Things about Cross-Sector Fluency in Our Leaders for the Future” (page 164)?

The Five Vital Traits

29. Now, reflecting back on the diagram of how the five vital traits of Rebuilders work together (Figure I.1, pg. xii), what’s your reaction to the model? And especially the *Generosity-Complexity* and *Authenticity-Data* dyads?
30. What traits and qualities do you see as being especially vital and resonant for this decade ahead? Where do you agree and disagree with Paul’s assessment?



Case Studies: Past, Present, and Prospective

4 PART

“Toward the end of the book I offer three case studies, because I want readers to have a holistic view of some real-world applications, not just see this in its parts.”

— Paul Shoemaker

Questions

1. Generally speaking, innovation has been the primary focus of most business and leadership books of the past twenty years. *Taking Charge of Change*—while it affirms the necessity of innovation—puts emphasis in a different direction to address our most urgent needs now. It advocates we shore up and promote doing more with what we have by reusing, recycling, reinvesting, rethinking, refurbishing, and rebuilding. What do you find appealing or unappealing about this message?
2. Learning from failure is just as important as learning from success. In the first case study, leadership was, essentially, terrific at two of the vital traits but missing the mark badly or suspect on the other three. Reflect on a time when you or a leadership team in your sector failed in driving change. Were you or the team delivering on all five traits? If not, share the example with the group.
3. The author asserts that we *know* how to solve some of our really big, gnarly problems. It’s been proven by repeated results of highly successful solutions duplicated in different communities, again and again. Setting aside that we don’t have unlimited funds to scale, why do you think we’re not solving for these problems everywhere in America now?
4. In what ways, if any, does the second case study of Built for Zero achieving “functional zero” for veteran homelessness in Chattanooga, Tennessee, inspire you?
5. Leadership at the decision-making table as described in the third case study is the *standard* to set for the 2020s. But so is having these traits represented up and down our organizations in key departments, positions, and on the frontlines. How might we recruit and assess for these five vital traits in hiring—and development them in ourselves and our current teams?



Rebuilder Rosanne Haggerty



Our Possible Futures, chapters 10–12

5 PART

“As I state in the book, ‘I am worried about America in the dark of night, but fundamentally optimistic in the light of day.’ I truly hope my message around the critical need for Rebuilders in the decade ahead—and the evidence that many are already out there showing the way—is an uplifting, positive one. Inspiring practical steps in the right direction.”

— Paul Shoemaker

Questions

1. After reading this book, can you envision yourself as a Rebuilder?
2. Consider the author’s opening story to Part Five on pages 175–176. If the last few years have left you feeling confused and angry, too, what are you doing with that confusion and anger now?
3. “Never let a crisis go to waste.” When you think about the leadership challenges ahead and the lessons from Rebuilders in this book, what heartens or inspires you most?
4. Far more private sector leaders authentically see themselves and their leadership role in a wider, more sociopolitical perspective now than just a decade ago. Recent events in 2020 and 2021 have been a force multiplier for this; for example, consider how the private sector responded to the Jan 6th attack on the Capital even before government acted. What examples can you cite that encourage you that this shifting, more socially responsible understanding of business leadership roles will be a force for good?
5. What’s your opinion of the increased blurring of traditional lines between the three sectors, such as for-profit companies having double- and triple-bottom lines or the growth of public-private partnerships for financing solutions, or civic organizations that take private funding and resources to execute their programs?
6. In Chapter 11: It’s All About the Three Sectors, the author makes specific recommendations for cross-sector partnerships, highlighting the relevance of Rebuilders to each sector (pages 182–186). Thinking about the sector(s) you operate in, is there a suggestion here that appeals to you to act on? Or do you have your own recommendation to offer?
7. While all five traits of Rebuilders are vital, the author lists in Chapter 11 the most needed trait right now in each sector: *Cross-Sector Fluency* for private companies, *24-7 Authenticity* for public entities, and *Data Conviction* for nonprofit organizations. What are some implications of this for your own leadership?
8. Do you believe rebuilding America is possible? Likely?
9. What will *you* do to lead change in the 2020s?



**Rebuilder Chris
Gregoire**

Activate It

A Simple Exercise to Jump-Start Implementation

“I want change agents to think about their leadership intentionally. There are many leaders who don’t really think about leadership, they just do it. If they’re lucky, they’re good at it—but most of the time they aren’t. So my great hope is that this book introduces a purposefulness and direction for clear action steps that change agents can take around how they approach leadership.”

— Paul Shoemaker

Exercise

I. For each of the four scopes of work listed below, reflect on and answer these questions.

As an individual:

- What leadership muscle among the five vital traits am I good at—versus which do I need to build or strengthen?
- How can I be a role model to others for a trait that I excel at?

As a team:

- Which of these five qualities and skill sets are we strong in—versus which are we missing or need to build together?
- How do we help each other see what we’re powerful at?
- And how will we enable and accelerate each other’s development as leaders?

As an organization or company:

- What kind of leadership traits exist up and down our organization?
- In which of the five traits are we lacking?
- How are we making sure powerful leadership attuned to the needs of the 2020s is distributed both vertically and horizontally across our org chart? Not bolted on or relegated to some separate department but interwoven into the whole fabric of the organization?

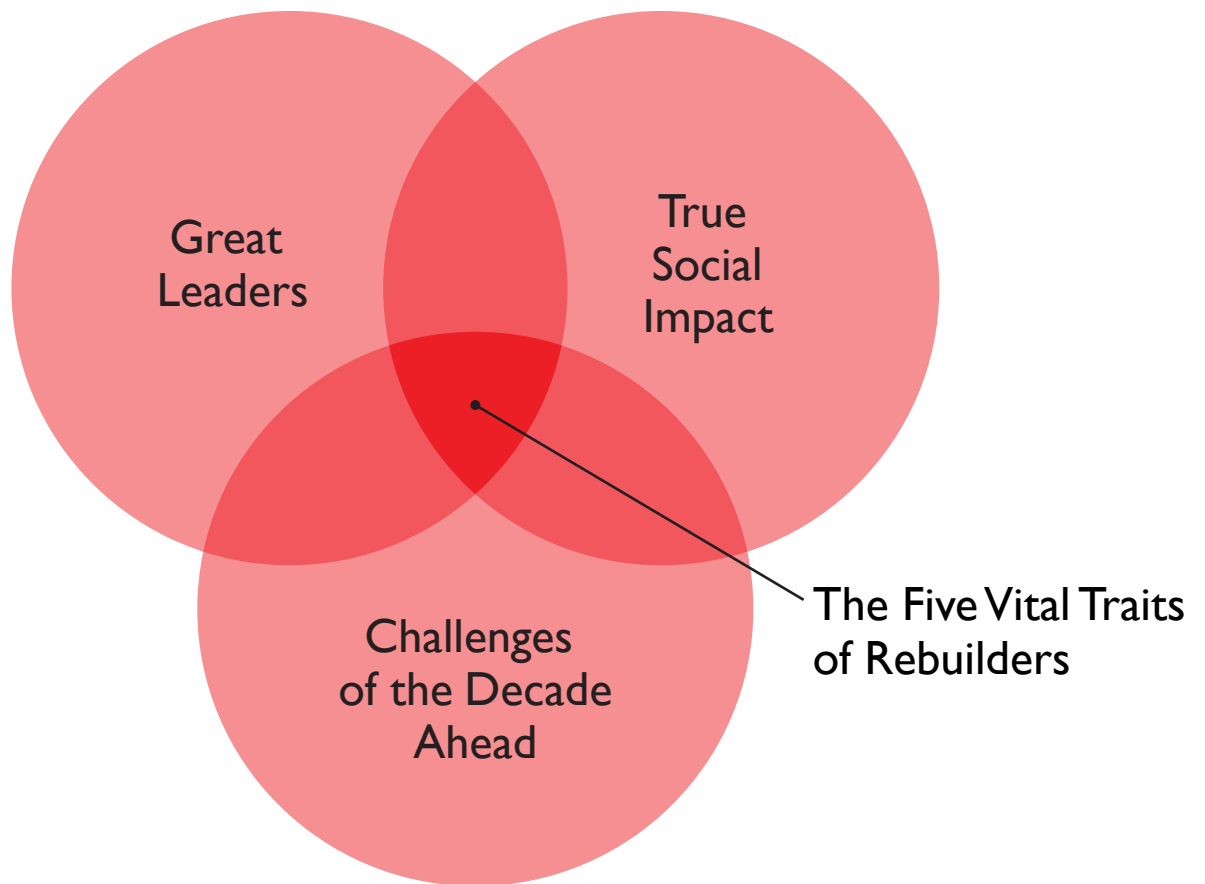
As a neighborhood or community:

- Do we have the right mix of engaged citizens and local leaders with the individual qualities and tangible skill sets to truly help solve problems we face?

II. Next, find targeted resources to strengthen any of the five vital traits of Rebuilders by visiting www.paulshoemaker.org/five-vital-traits and selecting the trait name. These resources include articles, assessments, leading organizations, online talks, books, educational courses, and more—many of which are offered at no cost.

III. Join in the crowdsourcing. One way we can make this discussion guide more helpful to everyone is to crowdsource resources. If you are willing to share your best articles, assessments, books, tools, etc., to add to <https://www.paulshoemaker.org/five-vital-traits>, please email then to shoe@paulshoemaker.org and cite the source. Thank you for helping every leader be a better Rebuilder.

Venn Diagram for *Taking Charge of Change*



Next Steps to Engage the Community

“The Rebuilders whose stories I’ve shared in this book are already leading the way—but we need more of them. And we need to intentionally connect more who are like them together in the 2020s.”

— Paul Shoemaker

Want to learn more and connect with other Rebuilders?

- Listen and subscribe to the podcast Rebuilders: The Leaders We Need for the Decade Ahead at www.paulshoemaker.org/podcast.
- Get involved with one of the social impact initiatives of any of the book’s thirty-eight Rebuilders. Visit www.paulshoemaker.org/the-38-rebuilders for a complete resource list.
- Review *Taking Charge of Change* on Amazon.com, LinkedIn.com, or your favorite bookselling site or social media platform.
- Bring in Paul to speak at your event, business, or organization: <https://www.paulshoemaker.org/speaking>
- Engage Paul as a consultant on a strategic issue or business model, organizational, or leadership challenge: <https://www.paulshoemaker.org/consulting>



“Thank you!”