

Factory Forward™

WHERE VISIONARY LEADERS &
HIGH-PERFORMING TEAMS BEGIN



**Positive
Leaders**
TRAINING



INSIDE THE FACTORY

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Firefighting keeps you alive. Vision makes you unstoppable. It's time to choose.



WHO WE ARE (AND WHY THIS BOOK EXISTS)

If you met us in person, you might be a little underwhelmed. Two middle-aged ladies at your office door. One in a bright pink jacket, talking with her hands like she is conducting an orchestra. The other quieter, already eyeing the coffee machine. We will probably bribe you with our famous Portuguese tarts and get sidetracked talking about musicals before we talk business.

Not exactly what you would picture as “revolutionary thinkers,” right?

But here is the truth. Behind the pink jackets and pastry boxes sits 60 years of CEO experience. Between us, we have built and run multimillion-dollar businesses, turned chaos into culture, and now spend our time consulting across manufacturing, food, and tech.

That cross-pollination has given us a rare perspective. Tech and manufacturing may look worlds apart, but once you are inside, they are strikingly similar. Both run on production lines, technical expertise, tight margins, and a relentless demand for efficiency. We have had a front-row seat to both. And because of that, we can see clearly what is coming for Australian manufacturing in the next five years.

HERE IS WHAT WE HAVE FOUND



What worked before no longer works.



Middle management is stuck. Undertrained, overburdened, and blocking strategy flow.



CEOs are exhausted, spending more time putting out flames than shaping the future.



The sector is facing pressures it has never faced before. Global competition, consumer shifts, AI, robotics, and workforce shortages.

AND IT IS NOT JUST YOU. IT IS EVERYWHERE.

At first, we thought these were simply leadership problems. But after years of working across companies, comparing notes, and watching the same issues play out again and again, we realised it is deeper. The problem is systemic. Cultural. Structural. It is the way businesses are being led, and it will not survive what is coming next. That is why we built the Leader7 Framework. It is not theory. It is the culmination of our work inside dozens of businesses, across industries, with leaders and teams at every level. It has been tested, refined, and proven with CEOs who were drowning in firefighting and came up for air with vision, alignment, and momentum.

So yes, we might walk into your office with Portuguese tarts and playlists, but do not be fooled. We are here to get you out of chaos and into clarity.

This little book is not about us. You can look us up on LinkedIn if you want our backstories. And just so you know, we are not giving away the whole cow here. What follows is a taste. Enough insight to shift your thinking, open your eyes, and spark the conversation that could change everything.

This book is about you.

It is about why everything feels like firefighting right now. Where the pressure is really coming from. Why your people are not aligned. And most importantly, what you can do to stop the chaos and lead differently.

BECAUSE HERE IS THE BOTTOM LINE:

- The next five years will be harder than the last twenty.
- Command and control leadership is dead.
- Without vision, alignment, and adaptability, your business will not survive.



THE GOOD NEWS?

There is a way forward. We have seen it, we have tested it, and it works.

**This is your moment.
Not to firefight.
To lead.**

The Reality Check with Manufacturing Today

Let's call it like it is.

If you feel like you're working harder than you ever have in your career and still not getting ahead, you're not imagining it.

The ground has shifted under your feet.

IN
YEARS **35**

In manufacturing, we've never seen leaders facing pressure from so many directions at once. No wonder most CEOs feel like they're constantly in firefighting mode.

And here's the thing:
this isn't just post-COVID fallout.

Yes, COVID poured rocket fuel on the fire. It sped things up. It made the cracks visible. But the truth? These shifts were already happening long before 2020. COVID just ripped the band aid off.



We've sat with dozens of manufacturing leaders in food, materials, engineering, and no matter the sector, the story is the same. The leadership models that worked twenty, even five years ago, simply don't deliver anymore.

Staff are disengaged. Change doesn't stick. And leaders feel like they're flip-flopping when in reality, the old structures are too slow for today's world.



The market has moved into hyper-speed. Competitors are forming ecosystems and partnerships out of nowhere. Consumers want cleaner, greener, healthier, more transparent products yesterday. And global tensions are reshaping supply chains in real time.

This is not business as usual. This is business in a new world.

So here it is, in black and white. The 7 Critical Pressures shaping manufacturing today.

THE 7 CRITICAL PRESSURES + YOUR PLUS ONE

01 BURNOUT

The weight of constant firefighting, decisions, and sleepless nights is relentless, and it shows up in your leadership team.

02 NEVER-ENDING CHANGE

Markets, policies, compliance, and supply chains shift without warning. On top of that, AI, robotics, and automation are advancing faster than most plants can keep up. The pace of change never slows and leaders who hesitate risk falling behind.

03 HYPER-COMPETITIVE MARKET

Margins are razor thin, offshore competitors are circling, and differentiation is harder than ever.

04 CUSTOMER DEMANDS

Greener, cheaper, faster, better, transparent. Customers want it all, and they want it yesterday.

05 TALENT, RETENTION & MIDDLE-MANAGEMENT GAPS

It's a war for skilled people. Younger generations aren't lining up for manufacturing, your best people are tempted daily by new offers, and high turnover plus under-skilled middle managers equals chaos on the floor and disconnect at the top.

06 CULTURE & SILOS

Legacy politics, poor communication, and entrenched silos kill alignment. Culture is the hidden tax draining performance.

07 FINANCIAL SQUEEZE & COMPLIANCE PRESSURE

Energy, raw materials, logistics, and insurance costs are escalating fast in Australia. Add food safety, ESG, sustainability, and cyber requirements piling up every quarter, and it's a constant balancing act between staying compliant and staying competitive.

BONUS #8 — HQ DEMANDS

And lucky you, you might score Bonus Number Eight. For leaders in subsidiaries, the added reporting and compliance required by global head offices increases workload and takes time away from local priorities. The result is that many leaders spend too much time in reactive mode rather than leading proactively.



WHY THIS MATTERS

If you've been wondering why it feels so hard, this is why.

Even two or three of these pressures would be a challenge. But you are facing all of them, all at once, with a leadership model built for a slower, simpler world.

No wonder you're exhausted.

And if you're not facing these pressures yet, you will be soon. We don't say that from a place of arrogance. We say it because we're involved in tech, we see what's happening on the front line, and through our work with tech-forward manufacturing companies, we see what's coming. These critical pressures are not far off.

But here is the good news. In the last five years, we've found a way through. A way to step out of firefighting mode and lead with clarity, resilience, and vision.

And it starts with you.

This is your chance to become one of the greatest leaders your industry has ever seen.

The 7 Challenges of the Next 5 Years

But first let's look at the future. If the pressures you're facing today feel heavy, here's what the next five years are bringing. These aren't maybes, they're already forming on the horizon.

THINK OF THIS AS YOUR FIELD GUIDE TO WHAT'S COMING NEXT.

01 TALENT DRAIN

The manufacturing workforce is ageing out, and migration is not filling the gap quickly enough. Younger generations are not viewing manufacturing as an aspirational career, leaving factories short of fresh energy and ideas. This will result in a widening gulf between the experience we're losing and the new skills we're not gaining. Without bold strategies to attract, develop, and retain talent, the drain will deepen.

02 GLOBAL SQUEEZE

Economic volatility isn't going anywhere. Trade tensions, especially between the US and China, are reshaping supply chains and putting pressure on costs and margins. Australia often feels these shocks first and hardest. Leaders will need to build resilience and flexibility into their operations just to keep up.

03 INNOVATION GAP

For too long, many companies have played it safe. Post COVID caution has slowed risk-taking, particularly in food, where Australia used to lead the way in creativity and innovation. But competitors are moving fast, investing in new products, processes, and business models. Those who fail to innovate won't just fall behind, they'll risk becoming irrelevant.

04 CUSTOMER PRESSURE

Consumers are demanding more than ever before. They want products that are healthier, cleaner, greener, and more transparent about their origins. They want to know the story behind what they're buying, and they want it delivered faster. Companies that cannot respond to this rising demand will lose trust and loyalty.

05 TECH DISRUPTION

Automation, robotics, and AI are advancing rapidly. Yes, adoption is happening, but not at the pace required to solve talent shortages or keep up with global competitors. In five years, the gap between leaders who harness technology and those who hesitate will be enormous. The question is not if you'll need to adopt more tech, but how fast you can get there.

06 LEADERSHIP LAG

Traditional command and control leadership is reaching its expiry date. Younger generations won't engage with it, and fast-changing markets won't wait for it. Leaders will need to shift towards adaptability, resilience, and alignment, skills that empower teams rather than control them. Those who cling to the old model will find themselves stuck, frustrated, and left behind.

07 MARKET SPEED

The clock is ticking faster for everyone. Business cycles that once took months now take weeks, and decision-making windows are shrinking. Competitors who can respond quickly will seize opportunities while slower organisations drown in delay. The pace of the next five years will reward agility above all else.





TAKE A BREATH

Yes, that was a lot.

Big breath.

Don't reach for the comfort food just yet.



Because here's the good news. You don't have to tackle these challenges alone, and you don't have to keep firefighting forever.

We know you already know this. You're the leader of your division or company, and we're not here to tell you how to suck eggs. What we are doing is putting it all in a black-and-white list so we can focus on the whole picture, not piecemeal fixes. Because the solutions that work are systemic, holistic, and aligned.

Breakdowns are breakthroughs in disguise. You've got this. You just need updated tools in your toolbox and a mindset built for the new world.

We've been working with manufacturing leaders who are already leaning into these shifts. We've seen what works, what doesn't, and how to move from reactive to proactive. And we'd love to share those solutions with you.



These challenges aren't here to overwhelm you. They're here to give you clarity. To show you what's coming so you can prepare, not panic.

**And we'd love to talk
to you about how.**

The Old Model

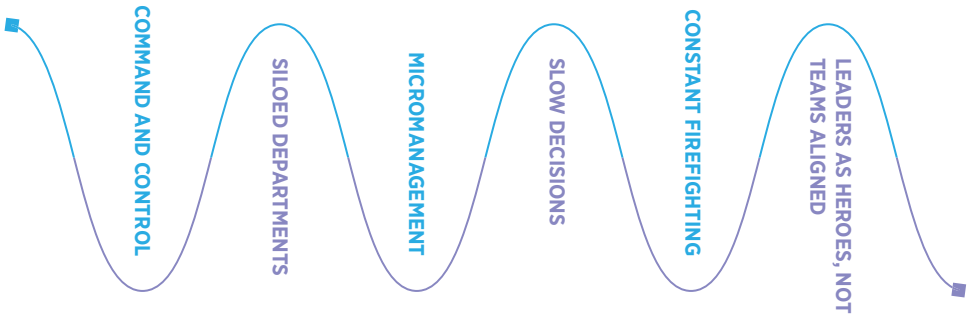
The Hero Model is Broken

You've probably heard of Agile, Six Sigma, and Lean. Most manufacturing leaders are using them today to great effect.

They've made valuable contributions, but here's the thing: they still rely on a leader out the front. There's still a pyramid, even if it's flatter. The hero model. The one with all the pressure sitting at the top.

That old model created stability once. But today, it creates bottlenecks, disengagement, and burnout. The speed and complexity of the new world have outgrown it.

THE OLD MODEL



OLD LEADERSHIP:
COMMAND,
CONTROL, AND
BOTTLENECKS.

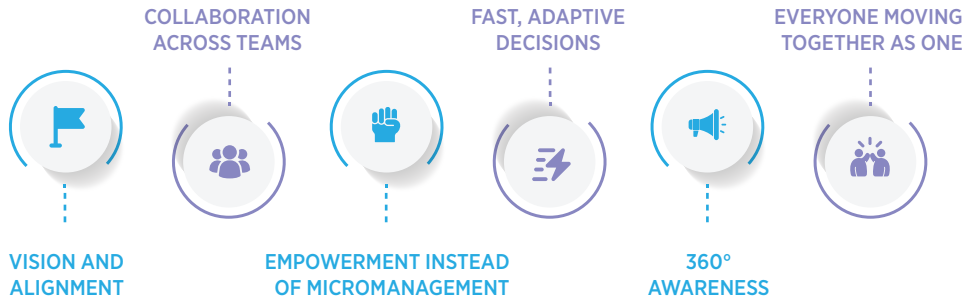


The New Model: The Turtle Formation (Team7™)

When we say “turtle,” we don’t mean the animal. We mean the famous military formation from ancient Greece, where soldiers moved as one unit, shields interlocked, spears aligned, covering every angle with a protective dome.

It was legendary for a reason. It was fast. It was resilient. It won battles. We believe it’s the perfect metaphor for today’s manufacturing leadership.

TURTLE MODEL (TEAM7™)



If you’re wondering where you are as the CEO, you’re right in the middle of the formation. Your number one goal is connection. The more connected and trusting you are of your team, the faster you will move.

TEAM7™ LEADERSHIP:
MOVE AS ONE, FASTER AND STRONGER TOGETHER.



CLOSING REFLECTION

The Turtle Formation is a synthesis model: Agile’s adaptability, Six Sigma’s discipline, and a new philosophy of collective leadership.

IT’S NOT ABOUT THROWING AWAY THE OLD.

IT’S ABOUT EVOLVING BEYOND THE PYRAMID INTO A DOME.



Why Vision Is Everything



**WITHOUT VISION, YOU ARE NOT LEADING.
YOU ARE JUST MANAGING CHAOS.**

We are writing a whole book on this, out next year. What you are holding now is the high-level version. A taste. An invitation. We are not giving away the cow here.



WHERE WE STARTED

At first, we worked with frontline teams. Then team leaders. Then executives. And eventually, we realised something: if the CEO or GM is not leading with vision, nothing sticks.

Because here is the truth: everything starts with vision.

As an entrepreneur, I learned this the hard way. My company did not succeed because we had the biggest budget or the flashiest tech. It succeeded because I had a crystal-clear picture of:

- The gap in the market
- Where we were going
- Who we were serving
- Why we were going to win

When it came to my vision for my companies, and as consultants for the companies we now work with, it went even deeper. It was about identifying the blue ocean. It was about painting a picture of how we solve the challenges we are facing, how we keep and retain the very best staff, and how we create an environment where those staff choose to stay. That is what powers results. That is what builds momentum.



**VISION GALVANISES TEAMS. ATTRACTS TOP TALENT. SOLVES PROBLEMS
BEFORE THEY EVEN HIT THE FACTORY FLOOR.**



WHY THE OLD MODEL DOESN'T WORK

In corporate manufacturing, we see it all the time: metrics, KPIs, endless dashboards. Plenty of private visions in the heads of GMs or PowerPoints from global HQ.

But rarely, almost never, do we see a holistic, 360-degree vision that looks five years ahead and answers every critical question a factory faces.

And that is exactly what is missing.



THE NEW MODEL VISION7™

We need something new. A vision broad enough to inspire, flexible enough to adapt, and regenerative enough to last.

Here is what our research and lived experience shows us:

Profit is the consequence, not the goal.

Do not get us wrong. We are both, Sandra and I, committed capitalists. We absolutely love business and our success is dependent on our profit margins, our revenue growth, and our successful exits. However, if we achieved what we did with the limited vision that we had, what we can do is expand that vision.

Since the 1970s, we have worshipped at the altar of the bottom line. Jack Welch at GE made it famous. Shareholders cheered, profits soared. But what got left behind? A hollowed-out company.

Look at Qantas today. Yes, the numbers looked great on paper. But customer service, safety, trust, gutted. And now the brand is paying the price.

That is the danger of bottom-line thinking.

Why can't we be more audacious? Why can't we think bigger? Because this is an opportunity that has never presented itself before. An opportunity where we can, and must, answer the challenges facing our industry and the market right now.

The goal is vision. A vision so compelling it:

- Aligns your entire organisation
- Dissolves silos and bottlenecks
- Inspires employees and their families
- Builds trust with customers
- Uplifts communities
- Restores the environment
- And positions you on the world stage

**This is not airy-fairy.
It is practical.
It is proven.
And it works.**





ENTER THE VISION7™ PROCESS FROM THE LEADER7™ FRAMEWORK

This is where our proprietary framework comes in.

We call it Vision7™. It is the model we use with leaders to design a vision that unites teams, strengthens culture, and solves the real pain points in manufacturing.

And here is the beauty of it: Vision7™ is flexible. It can be applied whether you are running an entire company, leading a division, or guiding a single team. The regenerative principles underpinning it work at any scale. If you are a CEO or GM, it gives you a blueprint for the whole factory. If you are a department head or team leader, it becomes the vision for your part of the business. And if you are an individual leader, it becomes your personal compass for impact and legacy.



A TASTE OF THE VISION7™ QUESTIONS

When we work with leaders, we take them through seven core questions and one bonus. Together, these form a complete, regenerative vision.

Here is a flavour of what we explore:

- How do you create a factory people are proud to work in?
- What legacy will your leadership leave behind?
- What would your customers desperately miss if you disappeared tomorrow?



WHY THIS MATTERS

So here is the question you need to sit with:



WHAT IS YOUR VISION?

Not your KPIs. Not HQ's quarterly targets.
Your vision.

The one that galvanises your people, inspires loyalty, anchors your community, protects the planet, and leaves a legacy long after you have moved on.

**THAT IS THE POWER OF
LEADER7™.**

**THAT IS WHAT WE BUILD WITH
OUR CLIENTS.**

**AND IT IS WHAT YOU NEED
RIGHT NOW.**

The Future Skills7™

The factories of the future will not rise or fall on the latest machine. They will rise or fall on leadership. On people. On culture.

Things have changed. Sandra and I have had to change with them. We have both had to unlearn, relearn, and stretch our own thinking. Old dogs really can learn new tricks.

And what we are sharing here is not theory. It is not a management fad. And it is certainly not another endless list of things to add to your plate.

The Future Skills7™ are the seven capabilities we have seen, tested, and watched deliver results in the field.

This is what we see working. This is where we see the biggest gaps in leadership teams right now. And this is where we have built coaching and training programs including train-the-trainer programs that embed these skills so they multiply across the whole organisation.

BECAUSE HERE IS THE TRUTH:

When you lean into these skills, leadership does not get harder. It gets easier. Your people step up. Teams take ownership. Culture improves. And everything begins to move forward with less friction and more energy.

1. ADAPTABILITY AND RESILIENCE

The ability to flex, pivot, and stay strong in the face of change. True resilience is fuelled by purpose, not toughness. Adaptability grows when people feel safe enough to experiment.

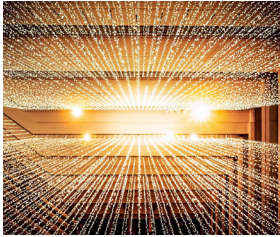


2. COLLABORATION AND SYSTEMS THINKING

The old world was silos. The new world is ecosystems. Collaboration across teams, industries, and even competitors creates opportunity. Systems thinking means seeing the whole and how every decision connects.

3. COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE BUILDING

Factories fail or fly on communication and culture. This is not about top-down updates. It is about listening to understand, inspiring people with purpose, resolving conflict, and building trust. Culture is the foundation of performance.



4. CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION

Technical skill is not enough. Out-of-the-box thinkers who bring fresh ideas and challenge assumptions will drive progress. Leaders who resist ideas will stall. Leaders who nurture creativity will find breakthroughs.

5. EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND COACHING MINDSET

Factories run on people, not just machines. Emotional intelligence builds trust quickly and navigates conflict with empathy. Coaching multiplies talent by asking better questions and unlocking potential.



6. DIGITAL FLUENCY AND LEARNING AGILITY

You do not need to code, but you do need to understand automation, AI, robotics, and data enough to align technology with people. Pair that with learning agility — the ability to learn, unlearn, and relearn quickly — and you are future proof.

7. ENERGY MANAGEMENT

Not time management. Energy management means knowing how to pace yourself and your teams, prevent burnout, and build rhythms of recovery. It is the secret fuel of sustainable performance.



These are not theories. They are the Future Skills™. They are what we see working right now in factories across Australia. And the leaders who build them will shape the future of manufacturing.



Machines keep the line running. People and culture drive the future.

A Future Vision

The future of manufacturing will not be built by managers. It will be built by visionary leaders.

That is why we do what we do.

We are often called the CEO Whisperer and the Team Whisperer. Together, we help leaders and companies build the future.

Here is how it works. I sit down with CEOs, GMs, or senior leaders, and together we design a vision. Not a bland mission statement, but something bold, inspiring, and crystal clear. A vision that answers the real pain points of the business. A vision so alive that leaders feel renewed, energised, purposeful, proud, and excited again.

Sandra works her magic with the teams. She untangles legacy issues, smooths resistance, rebuilds trust, and creates empowered, connected groups. She is a culture magician. She makes teams feel alive again.

One whispers to the CEO.

The other whispers to the team.

Together, we create transformation.

When you combine those two forces, a bold vision and a united team, you get what we call the turtle formation. A structure that is resilient, strong, and unstoppable.

This is the most fulfilling work we have ever done in our lives: helping leaders and companies like yours find their vision, align their people, and move forward with power.





A CASE STUDY: ELIZABETH'S TRANSFORMATION

Elizabeth's story might sound familiar.

She stepped into the GM role of a well-established manufacturing company carrying decades of legacy issues. She found silos everywhere. A leadership team that was overworked and disengaged. Minimal automation. Constant struggles with retention. And trust at every level was low.

Elizabeth had a vision in her head, but she could not communicate it. Instead, she found herself dragging, pushing, carrying the weight of the organisation on her own shoulders. Exhausted. Stuck. Sound familiar? That is where the work began. Sandra rebuilt trust and re-energised the leadership team. At the same time, I worked with Elizabeth to bring her vision to life, to make it bold, inspiring, and clear enough that everyone could see themselves in it.

Her new vision was transformative. She imagined a company known not for firefighting but for innovation. A company that attracted the brightest minds, partnered with universities, and pioneered automation and robotics to remove repetitive work. A place where people were reassigned to meaningful, high-impact roles. A business trusted for cleaner, healthier, more innovative food. A company that communities could be proud of.



The result? Elizabeth became a different leader. No longer drained, but energised. No longer pushing, but inspiring. Her team shifted from passive resistance to active engagement. And the company now has a clear, future-forward vision that excites everyone.



THIS COULD BE YOU

Elizabeth's story is not unique. It is the pattern we see again and again. Leaders become inspired. Teams become united. Companies find their future.

And now the question is simple:

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

The next five years of manufacturing will be defined by leaders who choose vision.

Your future is waiting. Lead it.

This is where we leave you, for now. If you are ready to stop firefighting and start leading with vision, Sandra and I would love to have that conversation with you.

Factory Forward™

Where Visionary Leaders and High-Performing Teams Begin

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Leader 7™, Vision 7™, Team 7™, and Skills 7™ are proprietary frameworks of Positive Leaders Training Company. These concepts and tools are used exclusively in our coaching and training programs and may not be reproduced or distributed without written permission.

The Framework

At the heart of our work is the Leader 7™ Framework — our trademarked approach designed specifically for manufacturing executives navigating disruption, talent shortages, and cultural transformation.

LEADER 7™ STANDS ON THREE CORE PILLARS:

Vision 7™

Aligning leaders and teams with a powerful, shared vision.

Team 7™

Empowerment, trust, and total team alignment.

Skills 7™

Embedding the future skills leaders need to thrive in the next era of manufacturing.

Together, these three pillars create the mindset, culture, and capability required for sustainable performance in Australian manufacturing.

Disclaimer

This mini book is designed to provide insights and leadership perspectives. It does not constitute financial, legal, or compliance advice. The strategies outlined should be adapted to the unique needs of your business.

Coming Soon

A full book expanding on Leader 7™ will be published in 2026, featuring detailed strategies, practical roadmaps, and case studies from Australian manufacturing leaders.



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