

**SAMPLE**

**GRACE**

**LEADING THROUGH**

**UNDER**

**CHANGE AND CRISIS**

**PRESSURE**

**JOHN BALDONI**

## **Advance Praise for *Grace Under Pressure***

“John Baldoni shows his exceptional understanding of taking highly complex components and simplifying them. *Grace Under Pressure* analyzes great skills, which I think anybody who wants to become better at what they are doing should read. I would definitely recommend this book!”

—**Martin Lindstrom**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Brand-Washed*, *Small Data*, and *Buyology*

“John Baldoni once again offers us powerful lessons in leadership and life. His new book *Grace Under Pressure* will help you brace for the unexpected and hold it together when everything is coming apart at the seams. As you put these principles into practice, you’ll find you and your team can be at your best when circumstances are at their very worst.”

—**Liz Wiseman**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Multipliers* and *Impact Players*

“In times of change, people look for a leader with the strength and resilience to persevere and the ability to lead with empathy and conviction. *Grace Under Pressure* by John Baldoni shows how leaders put people first, take care of themselves, and pre-prepare for what’s next. This book is for executives looking to steady themselves and their teams for change and crisis.”

—**Marshall Goldsmith**, the world’s pre-eminent executive coach and *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Earned Life*, *Triggers*, and *What Got You Here Won’t Get You There*

“John Baldoni has done the world a favor by introducing the language of grace into our conversation about leadership. I was a huge fan of his wonderful book *Grace*, and *Grace Under Pressure* continues this tradition, showing why grace is most effective in times of maximum pressure. The ability to exhibit courage and calm in our most challenging moments is precisely what inspires others to trust us, giving them the confidence to stay engaged when the going gets rough. *Grace Under Pressure* is not only inspiring, it is practical. Throughout the book, John offers questions for our consideration to identify how and where grace might be operating in our own lives so we can let it influence our relationships and actions.”

—**Sally Helgesen**, bestselling author of *How Women Rise*, *Rising Together*, *The Web of Inclusion*

“*Grace Under Pressure* reveals what leaders must do to look ahead past the crisis the same time they are caring for their teams. It’s powerful preparation for every leader’s inevitable tough times.”

—**David Novak**, former CEO of Yum! Brands, podcast host of *How Leaders Lead*, and author of *New York Times* bestseller *Taking People with You* and *Take Charge of You*

“If you can feel the screws tightening...this might be the book you need to find your grace under pressure.”

—**Michael Bungay Stanier**, bestselling author of *The Coaching Habit* and *How to Begin*

“Leadership is never easy, but when there’s great change or crisis, the heat is on. Fortunately, John Baldoni has provided leaders with a practical, powerful, and wise guidebook: *Grace Under Pressure*. This will be an essential tool for leaders under stress.”

—**Dorie Clark**, *Wall Street Journal* bestselling author of *The Long Game* and executive education faculty, Duke University Fuqua School of Business

“Leadership is revealed in times of crisis. *Grace Under Pressure* by John Baldoni provides insights into how to make your leadership resonate with purpose and grace. Leaders must care for their teams and themselves as they prepare for the future. Even better, they must do it with grace—caring, commitment, and courage.”

—**Garry Ridge**, the Culture Coach and Chairman  
Emeritus of the WD-40 Company

“With the spotlight shined on modern-day business leaders, there’s a greater demand to do more than be savvy and apply business acumen. Today’s leaders are expected to care and act out of concern not just for the company and its employees but to grasp how their role affects the greater welfare of all. *Grace Under Pressure* by John Baldoni shows us how to lead with courage, conviction, and compassion, especially in times of stress and urgency.”

—**Donald Altman**, author of *The Mindfulness Toolbox*,  
*Simply Mindful*, and *Clearing Emotional Clutter*

“John Baldoni’s new book is a beautiful example of combining science, practice, real-life examples, and deep humanity to offer ways for a modern leader to lead. I particularly like John’s combining ‘taking care of self’ with the aspects of taking care of people and preparing for the future. The Considerations that anchor each chapter are great coaching questions and wonderful ones to ponder and resolve. *Grace Under Pressure* is an easy read and yet leaves you with great reflections and practical tools to move forward.”

—**Magdalena Nowicka Mook**, CEO, International  
Coaching Federation (ICF)

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**SAVIO**  
**REPUBLIC**

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# Prologue:

## Grace Under Pressure

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*Grace Under Pressure.*

*When I hear that phrase, what comes to mind is the five-alarm fire. There's a lot of heat and there's a lot of noise and a lot of people scrambling around.*

*But if you look closely between the fire trucks, you'll see a battalion chief on site, calmly giving directions...with a very composed and collected demeanor.*

*That's what Grace Under Pressure is.*

*Grace Under Pressure means meeting...*

*Anger with composure.*

*Denigration with respect.*

*Sadness with compassion.*

*Scarcity with abundance.*

*Insults with smiles.*

*Selfishness with selflessness.*

*Hoarding with generosity.*

*Life with gratitude.*

*Today everyone is looking for a leader who can exhibit Grace Under Pressure.*

*Be collected. Be calm. Be composed.*

*This is someone that others can look to as trustworthy.*

## **COPING WITH CHANGE**

Change is the medium of our lives. Few things remain the same. What we know as reality may be gone tomorrow.

We learned this story during the pandemic. Suddenly the personal security many felt was consumed by the fear of becoming infected with a virus that could be as mild as nothing or as deadly as organ failure.

Fear of contagion provoked an economic crisis that closed businesses, many for good. It forced other people into unsafe work environments. And, it stretched our healthcare system to the breaking point.

Looking back, now that we can catch our breath, we know we can never again be complacent. Leaders will always face challenges, and how they conduct themselves when the pressure is on will be remembered for a long while.

When John F. Kennedy, then a US Senator, was finalizing his 1956 book, *Profiles in Courage*, he wanted to use the phrase, “grace under pressure.” Kennedy’s editor, Evan Thomas of Harper & Brothers, discovered that novelist Ernest Hemingway had used that phrase in a 1929 interview he gave to one of the leading contemporary observers of her time, the author and satirist Dorothy Parker, for an interview that appeared in the *New Yorker* magazine. It was a phrase in reference to courage that suited both the novelist as well as the future president; both were able to function in extremis, when tensions were high.<sup>1</sup>

“Grace Under Pressure” describes what it takes to remain calm in moments of urgency, when things are coming apart at the seams. Fight or flight takes hold. Many do the latter; leaders must select the former. Their future, as well as the futures of everyone around them, lies in the balance.

Good leaders do three things:

**One, they take care of their people**, putting their needs first so they can ensure the organization survives.

**Two, they take care of themselves**, making certain to be at their best because that’s what is demanded of them.

**Three, they prepare for the future**, thinking and doing what it takes to engage others to build a better tomorrow.

It is not enough to do one or two; it is imperative to do all three, often simultaneously.

## **BUILD COMMUNITY**

As important as these three steps are, there is something more—grace. In previous writings, I have defined grace as the catalyst for the greater good.<sup>2</sup> That definition still holds for me. When it comes to dealing with change and crisis, grace becomes evident in how we treat one another. Grace facilitates our ability to connect with ourselves more genuinely so that we can connect more humanly with others. Such connections are essential to keep oneself together when everything around seems to be falling apart. These connections do something even better: they create community, a place where people want to be because they feel they belong.

*Grace Under Pressure: Leading through Change and Crisis* will provide insights into how to achieve leadership through both change and crisis, and how to do it well. Augmenting the stories are interview comments from thought leaders in business and

human development about how to overcome feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, and stress. Resilience is essential. Learning to adapt to changing situations and to bring others along with you is essential to survival.

*Grace Under Pressure: Leading through Change and Crisis* is a look at how leaders focus on what's in front of them as well as what they need to do to prepare for a better tomorrow.

*When the heat is on, good leaders step forward.*

*They demonstrate that they have what it takes to deal with the pressure...and they bring others along with them.*

*Grace Under Pressure.*

*It's a good thought for our times.<sup>3</sup>*

# Part 1

## TAKE CARE OF YOUR PEOPLE

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**“When I asked for ideas about  
how I could be a better boss,  
I didn’t want so many.”**

*Leaders prove their mettle when times are toughest.*

*Face adversity with steely eyes and square jaws.*

*Alleviate stress among others by lessening the load.*

*Bend but do not break and teach others how to do the same.*

*Empathize to make things better.*

*Inspire by citing the examples of others.*

*Affirm the values of individuals, teams, and the organization.*

*Show they care by acting with care, compassion, and commitment.*

*Create community where people feel they belong.*

# Put Your Values into Action

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Caring for your people begins with a commitment to values. Values are the bedrock of any organization. It isn't easy to maintain our bearings with everything breaking and shaking around us, but so often we see that when an organization survives tough times, it is their values, their collective beliefs, that hold them together.

We cannot control events or circumstances, but we can control how we react to them and how we move forward through them. With that in mind, here are the values that I believe we need now more than ever.

**Integrity.** With upheavals come confusion and sometimes chaos. It can be hard to discern what's real and what's not. That is why it is imperative (double underscored) that leaders hold a torch on what's right and what's not. Leaders must reflect our moral compass.

**Truth.** The discernment of the way forward is rooted in the truth. Again, when everything is askew, it can be easy to favor the quick over the steady, the easy over the hard, and the hard over the soft. The arbiter of what must be done is truth. Without truth, there is only muddle.

**Humility.** The future is unknown. The “new normal” may not be entirely new or entirely familiar, but it will be what it will be. Humility is a reflection of vulnerability; it is the self giving itself permission to say, “I don’t know everything.” A leader who admits that is a leader who draws people toward them.

**Reason.** The ability to hold oppositional thoughts in mind is critical thinking. A leader must weigh the options using reason to discern truth and make decisions anchored in logic but rooted in love.

**Courage.** What is courage but an expression of bravery? A willingness to stand defiantly in service of a greater good over venality and mendacity? A courageous individual sets an example for others to be or to achieve something better.

**Humor.** Is humor a value? Well, if it’s not, it should be, because only by looking on the wry side of life will we be able to deal with the darkness and dread that encroaches. The release of humor is laughter, and it is laughter that affirms that we are alive. Why? Because we can look at all that’s around us and find lightness. Laughter is a release mechanism. Like letting air out of a balloon, laughter shakes our tensions and thereby relaxes us.

**Grace.** Grace is a gift without strings that we pass along to others. In doing so, we help others, and in turn, we help ourselves. Grace is the ability to give generously, to forgive readily, to show mercy, and to love without conditions. Grace lubricates living.

Lest this reflection turn into a sermon, let me add that these virtues must be coupled with the business drivers that will enable us to put our people back to work cooperatively and collaboratively. Such drivers include acumen, accuracy, and agility, as well as accountability and responsibility.

## GRACE UNDER PRESSURE

The emperor-philosopher Marcus Aurelius could have been reflecting on times like ours when he wrote, “Think of yourself as dead. You have lived your life. Now take what’s left and live it properly. What doesn’t transmit light creates its own darkness.” Good words for all of us. We ponder what to leave behind and what to take with us on our journey forward.

By no means is this list of values comprehensive. Feel free to add your own. Please do, because it means you are thinking of what you hold dear so that you will be certain to take it with you as you shape your new normal for your team, your family, and yourself.

### **CONSIDERATIONS:**

- How am I using my values to move ahead?
- Of the values listed above, which are most important to me? Why?
- What value would I add to this list?

# Turn Your Organization into a Community

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Values are the by-product of purpose—our why. Purpose sparks our vision—our becoming. It develops our mission—our doing. Purpose catalyzes us to achieve, but it does not say *how* we can achieve. Many people achieve greatness by acting more as a bulldozer than a tractor. A bulldozer flattens. A tractor pulls. In the former, the bulldozer steamrolls obstacles, even people. In the latter, a tractor drives ahead, drawing others in its wake.

There is a way to make purpose more compelling and appealing. We call it grace, a catalyst for the greater good.

Purpose is not inherently full of grace. Instead, it is powered by ambition, drive, and ego. Those are positives when they are used by a true leader, one more interested in bringing people together than in steamrolling opposition.

## **HOW GRACE TRANSFORMS PURPOSE**

Grace complements purpose. If purpose is our why, then grace becomes our how—the way we do things here. Grace shapes the values that bind members to one another. Values underscore

people feeling wanted. They believe they have a stake in the outcome. They know they belong. Grace transforms an organization into a community.

Grace is inherent to the human condition. Some might say our DNA includes it because we, as humans, true to our tribal nature, are inclined to help those closest to us. Grace, however, knows no biological kinship; it creates spiritual kinship. We are connected to others.

### **THINK ABOUT MUTUAL BENEFIT**

An organization without grace is one where people feel fearful, uncertain, and perhaps unloved. Without grace, there can be no community. There may be an organization, but there is no connection. People feel they do not belong.

My colleague Mark Goulston, M.D., a business psychiatrist and bestselling author, often talks about the need for people, especially those at risk for self-harm, to “feel felt.” Organizations can be alienating. Communities are embracing. In short, people feel emotionally connected to others within community. In the words of Dr. Goulston, they “feel felt.”<sup>4</sup>

An organization with grace becomes a community. A community shares ideas, collaborates more closely, and endures hardships. It knows sacrifice for the greater good. It is rooted in purpose. Its members understand what the organization wants to achieve and they are committed to working toward the vision, accomplishing the mission, and embodying the values they espouse.

Organizations are administrative. They are formed to do something. They are artificial constructs. At the same time, because they are human creations, they can be made better.

They can become communities where people feel they belong and can contribute to something greater than themselves.

## **ENABLING GRACE**

Grace facilitates our connections to one another. Grace complements psychological safety, a concept that author and professor Amy C. Edmondson of Harvard Business School has developed. When people feel safe, they can speak their minds, share their thoughts, and work cooperatively and collectively. Psychological safety encourages collaboration.

With grace, we do the following:

- Put others first.
- Listen before speaking.
- Look for problems to solve.
- Encourage people to speak out.
- Instill hope in the face of adversity.
- Drive out fear.
- Act with courage.

Doing so enables us to integrate purpose into our lives and create community with others.

## **CONSIDERATIONS:**

- Here's a thought experiment: consider your place of work. Do individuals feel as if they belong to a community?
- If so, how do people express this sense of belonging?
- If not, what can you do to create a community?

# About the Author

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John Baldoni is a globally recognized leadership educator, certified Master Corporate Executive Coach, and author of 16 books translated into ten languages.

John's books include *GRACE: A Leader's Guide to a Better Us*, *MOXIE: The Secret to Bold and Gutsy Leadership*, *Lead with Purpose*, *Lead Your Boss*, and *The Leader's Pocket Guide*.

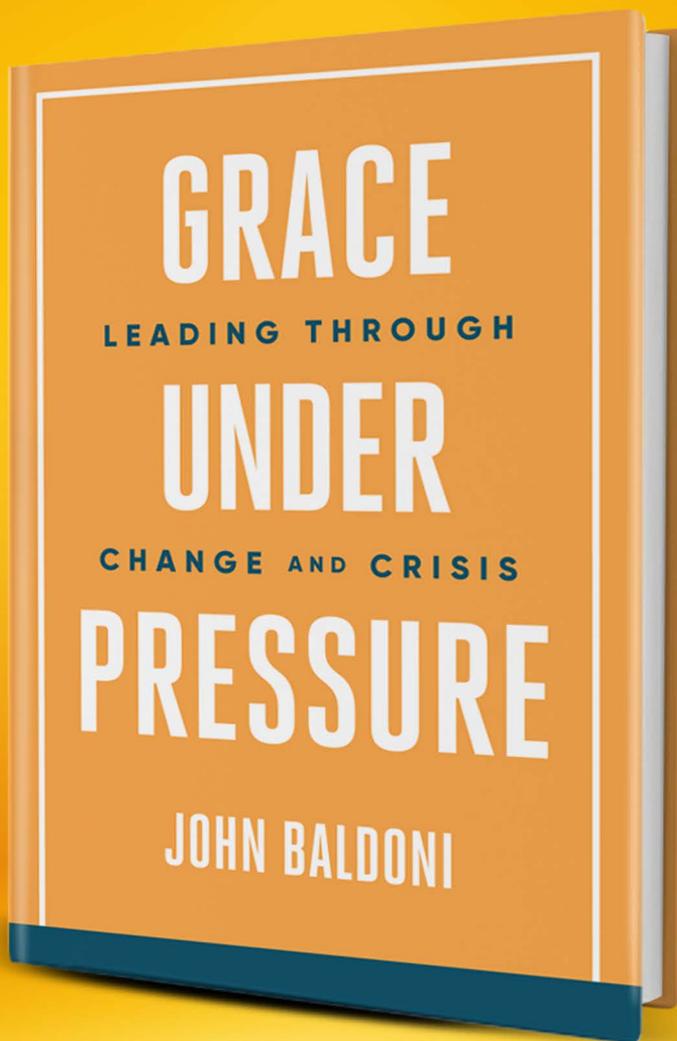
In 2021, the International Federation of Learning and Development named John a World-Class Mentor and named him to its Hall of Fame. In 2020 Global Gurus ranked John a Top 30 global leadership expert, a list he has been on since 2007. In 2018 Inc.com named John a Top 100 speaker and Trust Across America honored John with its Lifetime Achievement Award for Trust. In 2014 Inc.com listed John as a Top 50 leadership expert.

John is also a member of the renowned 100 Coaches, founded by Marshall Goldsmith. Members include executive coaches and thought leaders from the worlds of business, academia and social service.

John established a career as a highly sought-after executive coach, where he has had the privilege of working with senior leaders in virtually every industry from pharmaceutical to real estate, packaged goods to automobiles, and finance to health care.

John has authored more than 800 leadership columns for a variety of online publications including *Forbes*, *Harvard Business Review* and *Inc.com*. John also produces and appears in a video coaching series for SmartBrief, a news channel with over 4 million readers. John is also the host of LinkedIn Live's Grace under pressure interview series. John's leadership resource website is [www.johnbaldoni.com](http://www.johnbaldoni.com)

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