The little book of unorthodox management

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Our generation of professionals inherited a vocabulary of norms and practices from our predecessors.

They were coming from a century of industrial revolutions and big ideologies, and these shaped the way they built their teams, organizations and markets.
Big companies, formal relationships, bureaucracy, and an unhealthy obsession with control.

It worked well for decades.
Now we experience all of that as a burden. It results in a working experience that is stressful, not necessarily productive, often empty of powerful ideas, and with little tolerance for curiosity.

A new breed of managers is leading the change.
I work with hundreds of professionals a year, and I often meet this profile: managers who don't surrender to the norms they learned, and that are on a constant quest to find new ideas and blueprints.
They are determined to achieve ambitious results while having an overall meaningful and enriching working experience.
Less burnout and politics, more results and personal satisfaction.

I wrote this little book based on my experience and research as a consultant. I hope that it can be a springboard for all those who resonate with the vision above.

1 · **Performance fuels development.**
   Development fuels performance.

2 · **We need maps to make sense of how we can make progress.**

3 · **Learn from the Gardener, not from the Architect.**
   Nothing is naturally linear.

4 · **Leverage the chaos. Search for the areas of tension.**

5 · **Keep a critical approach towards information.**

6 · **Decisions are 80% data and 20% insight.**

7 · **Naming the problem is half way towards the solution.**

8 · **Network before politics.**

9 · **Burn the playbook - selectively.**

10 · **Train the muscles needed to thrive in a rugged landscape.**

11 · **Read.**

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1

Performance fuels development. Development fuels performance.

The orthodox manager compartmentalizes: there are training days and work days. It doesn't work.

Adults learn by solving problems. Work itself is the best source for learning, especially when matched by opportunities to reflect on what worked and why, and opportunities to explore new ideas, models, and case studies. It's also the manager's job to provide those opportunities.

If that learning has been impactful, the team's results will improve. If learning is centered on powerful, creative, and bold ideas, the team's results will be excellent.

The alternative to this approach is stagnation. Working without investing in effective learning means being forever relegated to the same results, without the possibility of reaching higher peaks.

Learning anything without the opportunity to integrate it in the everyday work - which is the norm I see in most organizations - is not learning: it's intellectual entertainment. I have nothing against it. It won't lead to any kind of professional development.

The unorthodox manager integrates development opportunities into daily life and guides the realization of learning in performance.

2

We need maps to make sense of how we can make progress.

We work in complex systems. We are continuously engaged in trying to understand them and making educated guesses on what we should do.

Ideally, all onboarding processes should provide a map that explains exactly how to deal with organizational politics, unexpected changes and acute crises. **Unfortunately that map doesn't exist.** We have no alternative but to draw it ourselves - and redraw it continuously.

We want a map that can show us all the projects we're involved in, which objectives we want to achieve, what are we learning about the people we work with, which ambitions are we developing. We start each day studying it, continue the day based on it, and end each day updating it.

It can take any form useful to us: a document, a notebook, a whiteboard. It's a safe space to look at our work from above. It's the gym where we train our ability to move from macro to micro and vice versa.

Without a map, we remain immersed in the micro, the small, the daily. **The map helps us translate daily experiences into useful conclusions for progress.**

3

Learn from the Gardener, not from the Architect. Nothing is naturally linear.
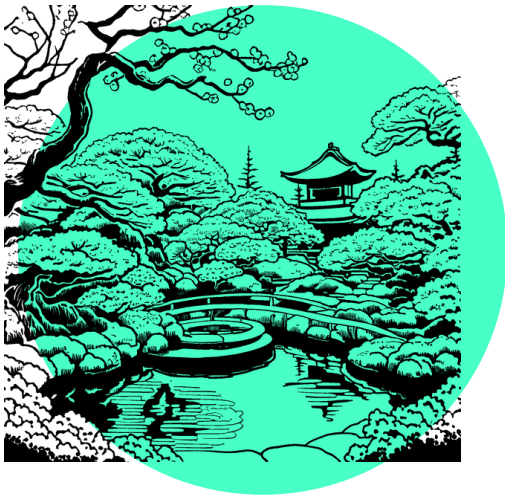
The Architect invests time and energy to set up an infrastructure that can stand the passage of time. When the building is ready, the Architect won't be around anymore.

The Gardener plants and nurtures. They are aware that they cannot control how the plants are going to shape up, or what insects and weather will affect their growth. They stick around, and intervene only when their actions solve big problems.

The Architect thinks that the world is linear. The Gardener knows that it isn't: it's chaotic. So they invests their energy in studying the soil and setting in motion natural dynamics that they can realistically support.

If we understand deeply the idea that we act in chaotic systems, we can abandon the illusion that maximum preparation means perfect results.

The unorthodox manager studies the people and dynamics around him and plants stimuli, ideas, and processes that can blossom into results. He is present, but intervenes only when his input has a tangible value.

4

Leverage the chaos. Search for the areas of tension.
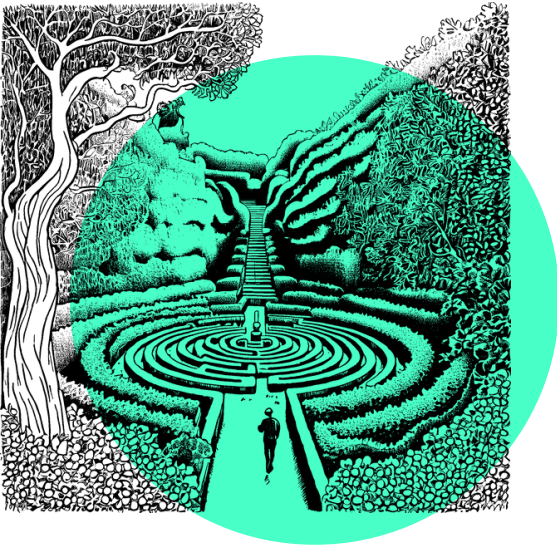
Chaos is a blessing.

The chaotic contains a wealth of information, ideas, and products that we can leverage to make progress. It's the difference between deciding what to cook starting from a messy refrigerator or from an empty one.

The chaos in which the manager lives consists of many elements: ideas, events, expectations, documents, deadlines, meetings, organizations, products, people.
We can draw a tentative map of the relationships between these elements, and we'll notice that some messy areas will emerge.

Those messy areas are areas of tension: they are symptoms of potential opportunities or problems. Even if we don't know exactly what will happen in those areas, we feel that things are moving and they can lead to an interesting development.

The unorthodox manager draws and redraws the map, actively seeking – and not fleeing from! – areas of tension.
What opportunities do they present? What scenarios and conflicts might arise? Which areas are worth exploring more in depth? How can we intervene?

Significant progress always begins by engaging with areas of tension.

5

Keep a critical approach towards information.

We live in uncertainty, and we need information to reduce our own feeling of uncertainty. In a crisis, or even to solve a problem, we ask question after question to obtain more data, and then use it to make decisions.

The information we receive is polluted by biases, noise, interests, and assumptions. Every polluted piece of information taken seriously leads to wrong decisions and negative results.

When we receive a message, written or spoken, we want to filter out as much true information as possible and leave out the rest.
(Leave out, do not eliminate: the assumptions and biases with which the information comes help us understand more about the person who gave us the information.)

What is factual and what is speculation? What interests does the story serve, and what alternative narratives exist? What information are we missing, what crucial questions haven't we asked yet?

The unorthodox manager knows that when any message arrives, their first task is to ask questions that purify it, until only the true and useful information remains.

6

Decisions are
80% data
and 20% insight.

Making a decision requires work. We identify possible directions, study them, and choose one. To understand what directions exist, we look for patterns. We calculate benefits and risks.

But data doesn't present us with cultural and social nuances that, accumulated and combined, affect risk and opportunity.
Sometimes it's about understanding how particularly influential people or group dynamics can skew our decisions (made in good faith based on data) in the opposite direction.

Data is not enough: it needs to be processed together with insight.
Intuitions, signals, and raw ideas that challenge and complement the data with what cannot be sensed by numbers.

It's a muscle that needs to be cultivated.
To cultivate it, we need to invest in reflection: in-sight. It doesn't mean blindly listening to every gut feeling - that's called immaturity. It's making a habit of spending time thinking and articulating our ideas in full sentences.

Decisions based solely on data can be logical decisions, but they will rarely be revolutionary decisions. The unorthodox manager takes decisions that are always logical, but never entirely so.

7

Naming the problem is half way towards the solution.
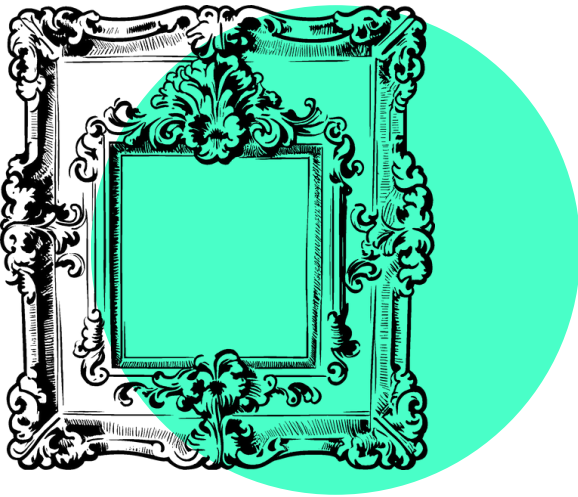
Always start with the problem.

Don't be afraid of the word "problem": all progress starts with a problem.

Start with the problem, and invest time in making a diagnosis, without jumping to the first treatment that seems promising. Don't start by asking yourself "What is usually done in these cases" or "What do they expect from me now". Ignore those who suggest a solution presenting it as obvious.

Give a clear, concrete, and concise definition to the problem. Not generic, not something that can be said by twenty other people in twenty different industries. A sentence that, if turned into a positive, describes the result you will achieve if you find a good solution.

When you define the problem, it will be much easier to choose in which areas you should develop a solution. The time spent trying to understand the problem will present you with the elements you can play with.

The unorthodox manager obliges themselves and their team to understand and define the problem. They know that it's the most effective way to start solving it and to prevent it from recurring in the future.

8

Network before
politics.

The old approach said: maintain good relationships with people who can be useful to you tomorrow. The unorthodox manager understands that this type of utilitarian approach is cynical and toxic.

Reciprocity cannot be calculated: "I did you two favors, so you owe me as many, or one particularly big one" is a childish approach.

I often see professionals who commit to organizational politics and end up drowning in them; on the contrary, the professionals who try to transform politics into authentic connections end up building a healthier network.

The unorthodox manager looks into the eyes of every person in their network - superiors, peers, or subordinates - and tries to develop an authentic relationship.

Reciprocity must be generalized: each of us contributes what we can to the network. Sometimes it won't work. Many other times we'll see that the effort of an individual will be leveraged by the support of the others. **A network looks more like a village than a bank.**

The unorthodox manager does not keep a credit score for each person around them: they foster authentic connections and do what they can to contribute to their network.

9

Burn the playbook - selectively.

We need playbooks to find clarity.

A playbook is the classic answer to the question "what am I supposed to do?" - it's easy, open up the playbook, it's written there. Playbooks help us standardize processes and keep a consistent performance.

Static playbooks are a mistake. **If we sanctify the playbook, we stagnate.** The process becomes more important than the product.

Playbooks must have an iterative nature. They must always remain open and undergo amplifications and changes informed by performance.

The ideal playbook is friendly, comprehensive, and concise.

It's not as verbose as an encyclopedia, otherwise no one will read it.

It has enough information and examples to cover 85% of the answers.
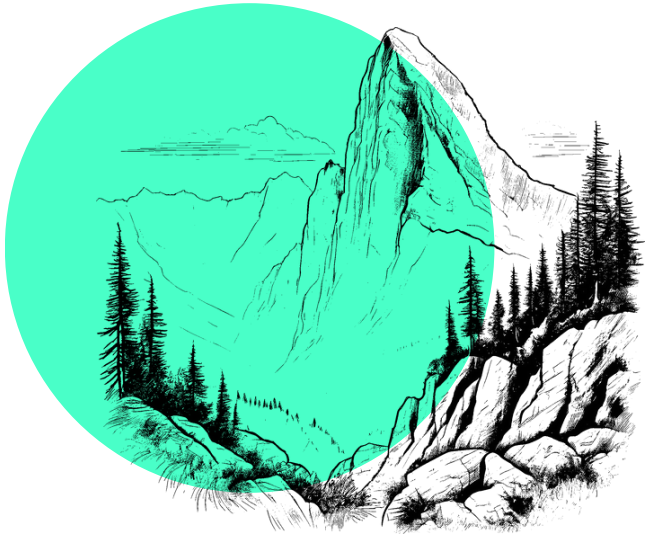
It can be consulted by anyone and on any screen.

It uses simple language, perhaps with a touch of humor.

An unorthodox playbook is like a mentor: it's always ready to help you, even when it's doing so to give you discipline. It moves away from bureaucracy as much as possible and does what it can to adapt to your needs.

10

Train the muscles needed to thrive in a rugged landscape.

I like the idea that we constantly move through landscapes. Evolutionary theories distinguish between smooth and rugged landscapes.

Smooth landscapes don't require much effort or specific skills; they consist of repetitive tasks and familiar projects - routine work.

Rugged landscapes require us to learn new skills to make progress. We engage with messy spaces and we face new technologies, new people, new cultures, new problems. We figure out some of those challenges, and we know how to deal with them next time we meet them.

A person who chooses to always stay in the same type of landscape is stuck with the same skillset their whole life.
Smooth landscapes spoil us, while rugged landscapes train us.

Making progress in our professional life depends on our exposure to new ideas and to new challenges. The only way to reach new peaks is to continuously explore different landscapes.

Look at the landscapes around you - the social, cultural, scientific, human landscapes - and get lost in them. **Over time, you'll learn to navigate them, map them, and you'll acquire the abilities needed to move skillfully between them.**

11

Read.

Read all the time.

Read while you eat breakfast and while you drink your tea. When you are alone and when you are with people. Read in the bathroom and in the meeting room. Make it your default action when you are not doing anything else.

We need to read to fuel our thinking and our relationships.

It's not only cognitive. It expands and deepens the way we think about relationships, the way we feel about values and people, the way we react to problems and events.

Reading is the favorite fuel and the unfair advantage of the unorthodox manager.

If you have enjoyed this book, you're the kind of person who understands that in order to evolve as a professional, you need to engage deeply with powerful ideas.

Now that we've started doing that, we can move forward and **explore some tools to help us integrate those ideas** in your managerial practice:
- The problem solving canvas
- The manager's control panel
- 1:1 meetings framework
- My top ten unorthodox content channels
- Selection of AI prompts for unorthodox managers

You can find them all here. They are free.

If you want to discuss how you can implement the approach you read here in your managerial practice, e-mail me at me@avyleg.com. I'd love to have a chat.

If you're serious about evolving your managerial practice, my online training **"Fundamentals of Unorthodox Management"** is perfect for you.
It's unlike any course you have attended so far, online or in real life.
Click here to sign up to the waiting list to be among the first to hear when it will launch.

I am Avy Leghziel.

Over the last 20 years, I have trained and consulted hundreds of professionals and organizations, first as a senior manager in global organizations and then as an independent consultant.

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