



RESEARCH REPORT

The Power of Two: Together on the edge

The practice and relational condition
of developing Integrated Leadership

UNLOCKING  EVE

LEADERSHIP
CIRCLE

EVA MCLELLAN
Co-founder, UNLOCKING EVE

KAYE VITUG
Co-founder, UNLOCKING EVE

ADAM KITT, PH.D.
Lead Researcher, Leadership Circle & UNLOCKING EVE

LANI VAN DUSSEN, PH.D.
Managing Director, Leadership Circle

STEVE ATHEY
Senior Partner and Principal, Leadership Circle



Table of Contents

Co-Founder Perspective	3
STANDING TOGETHER ON THE EDGE	4
What is Integrated Leadership?	4
Across our global workshops	5
THE POWER OF TWO PRACTICE	6
Where Leaders Hit the Edge: Within, Between, and Beyond	6
The Practice Loop	7
Preparing the Ground: The Integrated Leadership Diagnostic	12
THE POWER OF TWO RELATIONSHIP	13
A Relationship with a Developmental Purpose	13
The Five Conditions that make a Power of Two Relationship Genuinely Transformational	14
REFERENCE SHEET: CHOOSING A POWER OF TWO PARTNER	18
INTERVIEW CASE STUDY: THE POWER OF TWO IN PRACTICE	20
Eva McLellan & Kaye Vitug	20
Bill Adams & Bob Anderson	22
A FINAL WORD FROM LEADERS WHO HAVE WALKED THE EDGE	24
About the Research Team	25

Co-Founder Perspective

For decades, the standard playbook of leadership has orbited the myth of the solitary figure, the charismatic founder, the transformational CEO, or the lone disruptor. But as global systems buckle under interconnected crises, individual virtue is no longer enough to carry the weight of systemic change.

UNLOCKING EVE™ exists because of a partnership. Neither of us walked in with a finished plan for it. It came out of the space between two people and their community working at the edge of their capacity together, and this paper is our attempt to explain how that happens and why it changes what's possible for the leaders who find it.

This grew out of our own relationship first and a shared belief in a future leadership for our times. What began as two leaders supporting one another through parallel transformations at a global healthcare organization grew into something neither of us could have imagined: a shared identity, a shared purpose, and a body of work that emerged through relationship itself and was validated by the Power of Two practices and lived experience of leading as healthcare operators in the real world, which is something we describe as nothing short of magic (That story is told in full on page 20.)

Along the journey, we discovered that across our global workshops, 93% of leaders report greater impact practicing with a Power of Two partner. The pattern holds. Working alone gets you somewhere, but at the edge of your current capacity, growth slows and plateaus. Where individual effort stalls at thresholds, a partnership moves straight through. Working with a partner makes growth exponential. A Power of Two relationship births something new: new ideas, new impact, and sometimes, as it was for us, a new identity altogether, beyond what either person could have reached alone.

The best part? This dynamic isn't rare, engineered, or hard to find. It is already waiting in your daily life. Look at your own leadership life and you likely already know who this person is:

- The peer who cares and challenges your thinking and tells you what you need to hear.
- The colleague who gets your vision instantly and whose instincts pick up where yours end.
- The co-conspirator you rely on when the stakes are at their highest.

You are probably already practicing the Power of Two, but you just haven't named it yet.

As the fourth entry in the Integrated Leadership series, this field guide is your invitation to turn that informal spark into your greatest strategic advantage. Grounded in research, enriched by operator experience, and designed for real-time application, these pages explore the conditions that make leadership transformational, delivering exponential impact with far more ease, confidence, and joy.

True integrated leadership is not soft, nor is it about meeting in the middle. Compromise usually sacrifices the strength of both positions and labels the loss as maturity. By contrast, integration in leadership, as we have codified it, creates a broader operational range than either individual holds alone.

May this body of work help you find, nurture, and celebrate your Power of Two. Here's to leading with more joy, deeper connection, and exponential impact.



EVA MCLELLAN
Co-founder, Unlocking Eve



KAYE VITUG
Co-founder, Unlocking Eve

Standing Together on the Edge

The moments that shape a leader are rarely comfortable. They happen at thresholds. Moments where familiar patterns begin to fail and something more is required, when care and courage must coexist without collapsing into any single mode.

At the edge, growth asks something specific of leaders: to challenge the story they've been living within themselves, and to begin authoring a more powerful, and integrated one.

Growth at the edge demands more than insight, it demands another.

The assumption embedded in much of leadership development is that individual insight (i.e. "self-awareness") drives change: if we are self aware and act on that insight, then we will act better. But many leaders already know what they should or shouldn't do. They know they shouldn't lead from defensiveness, or override others when under pressure. But they do it anyway, not because they lack capability or awareness, but because these default patterns are protected by the very narratives that once helped them succeed.

In an attempt to hold on to the familiar, leaders will justify, rationalize, over-function, retreat, and protect. Under pressure, we return to what is most practiced, not what is most needed. Closing the gap between self-awareness and action is a developmental problem.

Development at the edge of our capacity is slow and uniquely difficult to do alone. Self-aware leaders eventually hit a growth plateau when working alone. While solitude helps you spot your patterns, it cannot challenge them.

In an attempt to hold on to the familiar, leaders will justify, rationalize, over-function, retreat, and protect. Under pressure, we return to what is most practiced, not what is most needed.

WHAT IS INTEGRATED LEADERSHIP?

An Integrated Leader is someone who draws on the full range of their leadership capacities and intentionally applies them to create an effective, holistic, and coherent leadership presence.

Integrated Leaders reject the idea they must operate from one mode of leadership at a time, such as being assertive or relational. Instead, Integrated Leaders lead from wholeness, blending multiple capacities together simultaneously to embody a form of leadership that is both assured and inclusive. This holistic approach expands their capacity to navigate complexity and cultivates environments where leaders, teams, and systems flourish in deep alignment with one another, while reducing the energetic cost to both self and system.

True breakthroughs require partnership. Facing live feedback, holding productive tension, and staying present when challenged transforms intellectual insight into real, lasting growth far faster than working in isolation.

Through our experience of helping leaders cultivate integration at the edge of their leadership development, we find that what accelerates transformation, and deepens it, is the experience of ourselves in relationship.

The Power of Two is a deliberate developmental partnership between two people, mutually committed to working at the edge of their capacity together, in service of realizing a shared purpose. This is a partnership where both leaders are simultaneously inside the developmental field: each leader brings their own edges, receives genuine challenge, and remains accountable to growth under real conditions. The partnership serves two ends at once, accelerating and deepening what solo development can take years to reach, and enabling the kind of impact neither leader could achieve alone.

In this paper, we explore what the Power of Two looks like: the practice, the relational conditions that make it possible, and the movements that make it genuinely transformative.

The Power of Two is a deliberate developmental partnership between two leaders, mutually committed to working at the edge of their capacity - together - in service of realizing a shared purpose.

ACROSS OUR GLOBAL WORKSHOPS

90%

OF LEADERS REPORT
MEANINGFUL POSITIVE
GROWTH IN EFFECTIVENESS.

93%

OF LEADERS REPORT GREATER
IMPACT WHEN PRACTICING
WITH A POWER OF TWO.

Greater intention in the practice drives performance growth.

Data drawn from UNLOCKING EVE pilot cohorts (n = 42).

The Power of Two Practice

WHERE LEADERS HIT THE EDGE: WITHIN, BETWEEN, AND BEYOND

Edges occur at thresholds: when our identity, capacity, or the range of our leadership is no longer sufficient for the impact we are trying to create. At their core, edges mark the limit of a leader's current integration. These are moments where the capacities they reach for most easily, whether Autonomous or Relational, can no longer meet what the situation asks of them. While these patterns once served as adaptive strategies — ones which protected identity, belonging, competence, or safety — they now over-function beyond their usefulness, and limit integration.

Edges unfold across three interconnected fields: within the leader, between people, and beyond into the systems they are part of. Navigating development across these fields is a core part of the Power of Two framework. These are not sequential stages but simultaneous fields of development: a growth in one rarely leaves the others undisturbed.

- A shift **within** cultivates heightened self-awareness and an expanded identity, capable of accessing a wider range of Autonomous and Relational capacities.
- A breakthrough **between** amplifies what becomes possible when two leaders bring that range into relationship, generating force neither could produce alone.
- A movement **beyond** carries integrated leadership into the systems they are part of, shaping the conditions for healthier organizations, communities, and outcomes.

When we asked leaders in our cohorts what causes them to stop and think about their leadership, five common edges surfaced.

Edges unfold across three interconnected fields — within the leader, between people, and beyond into the systems they are part of. Navigating development across these fields is a core part of the Power of Two framework.

WHERE LEADERS HIT THE EDGE

1

"Am I responding in the way this moment actually requires, or just what I'm most familiar with?"

2

"How do I know I'm growing - and not just staying busy?"

3

"How do I keep people engaged when trust or energy is low?"

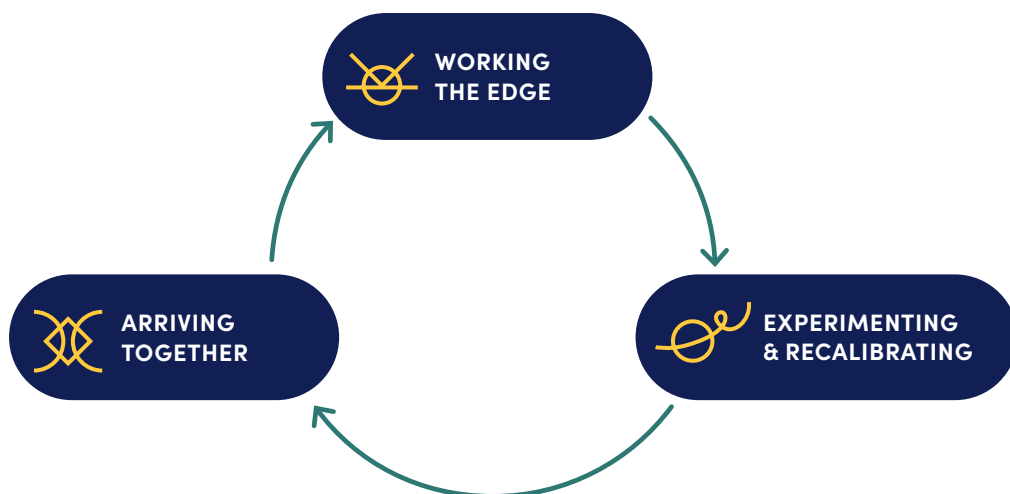
4

"How do I manage what I'm carrying - without depleting everything else?"

5

"How do I remain effective when the system feels like it's working against me?"

Data drawn from 30 leaders within UNLOCKING EVE pilot cohorts answering the question, "What causes you to stop and think about your leadership?"



THE PRACTICE LOOP

The Power of Two practice gives two leaders a structure for harnessing their collective range and using this to cultivate greater integration between them. It is not a fixed methodology but an ongoing, repeatable rhythm of co-development. A dedicated space where two people commit real time to their development with honesty, care, and clear action. When practiced well and under the right conditions (see page 13), edges convert into developmental experiments that expand perspective and identity, amplify capacity and range, and unlock breakthroughs that previously felt unattainable. Leaders also report a sense of joy, wholeness, and interconnectedness.

The loop is simple by design and contains three distinct phases: **Arriving Together**, **Working the Edge**, and **Experimenting & Recalibrating**. These phases are not simply sequential steps in a conversation. Each cultivates a deeper developmental function that is important for integration, and each protects against the identity-level defenses that cause transformation to stall and partnerships to naturally collapse.

Over time, partners find their own rhythm; they begin to move fluidly across phases as the practice becomes more familiar. They build the ability to arrive truthfully, work patterns rather than positions, and experiment with new ways of being under real conditions, which lets them navigate increasingly complex edges together.

The Power of Two practice gives two leaders a structure for harnessing their collective range and using this to cultivate greater integration between them.

Overview of The Three Phases in the Power of Two Practice

PHASE	SURFACE FUNCTION	DEEPER DEVELOPMENTAL FUNCTION
Arriving Together	Starting the session	Building relational presence and shared reality
Working the Edge	Exploring the issue	Increasing the ability to stay conscious at the edge of their identity
Experimenting & Recalibrating	Taking action & learning	Rewiring leadership patterning through lived practice



1. ARRIVING TOGETHER

Before an edge can be worked, two people must arrive. Not only to the meeting, but to themselves, to each other, and to the reality of the moment they're entering together.

Arriving Together is the practice of establishing shared reality before the deeper developmental work begins. It is less about 'checking in' and more about becoming present enough for something real to emerge. What distinguishes it from any other meeting opening is mutuality: both partners are simultaneously the subject of the work, not one helping the other arrive.

Here, partners account for their current state, surface what feels alive or unfinished between them, and lightly orient toward where attention may need to go. Done well, this creates enough trust, honesty, and relational presence for deeper work to become possible. It is also the first integration of the session: where the Autonomous capacity to land in your own state meets the Relational capacity to make room for someone else's.

Without sufficient arrival, the session can default into performance, premature problem-solving, or asymmetrical presence. Two people who have not yet truly arrived tend to speak at the issue rather than from within the reality they are living. As a result, the session becomes productive, but not developmental. Over time, partners discover that arrival is not separate from the work; the way a person enters the room can already contain a signal for the pattern they may most need to see.

Practiced well, *Arriving Together* develops and disrupts the following:

ARRIVING TOGETHER DEVELOPS:	ARRIVING TOGETHER DISRUPTS:
Relational presence	Performing competence
Self-awareness in real time	Rushing toward usefulness
Emotional honesty	Hiding tension beneath politeness
Attunement to the partnership field	Moving too quickly to solutions

In practice, this can look like:

- Surface anything that's charged between you since your last meeting, before moving into "the topic."
- Share what you are actually carrying: your current state.
- Name something unresolved, avoided, or emotionally present beneath the surface.
- Notice when one partner has become significantly quieter, or more performative.

Over time, partners discover that arrival is not separate from the work; the way a person enters the room can already contain a signal for the pattern they may most need to see.

- Stay with moments that feel unexpectedly alive rather than rushing past them.
- Pay attention not only to the content of the conversation, but to the atmosphere between you.

How maturity shifts the practice: Early partners arrive at the meeting; mature partners arrive at each other. Early in a partnership, arriving can feel sequential and slightly performed. Partners may exchange updates before either has fully landed. The impulse is toward usefulness and efficiency. Mature partnerships arrive more truthfully. Paradoxically, their arrival becomes both quicker (because less performance is required) and slower (because they will not move past what is alive between them just to begin).



2. WORKING THE EDGE

Every meaningful conversation between leaders reaches a point where relational exchange is no longer enough. It requires an edge. Without it, the practice drifts into conversation.

Working the Edge is the practice of moving from the situation a leader has brought into the pattern beneath it. It involves recognizing the signals of an edge as they surface, exploring it, and naming that pattern together. From there, partners help each other examine the assumptions and the narratives that underpin their leadership. Done well, leaders gain deeper clarity around what they are protecting, overusing, or avoiding — and which patterns of capacities, Autonomous or Relational or both, the edge is built around.

Signals that you're near an edge are many: a moment where an action didn't meet its intended impact, a story becomes suddenly over-explained, or humor appears at moments of discomfort. These signals can reveal patterns where one capacity, or a set of capacities, has begun to crowd out another and limit integration. For example: Rational analysis foreclosing Intuitive sensing, or a Powerful drive crowding out Empowering attention.

Partners are encouraged to notice these signals, inquire beneath the content, and stay with the inquiry long enough that the pattern becomes a visible edge in the space between them. Crucially, both partners are responsible for this. One does not "bring" the edge while the other "helps interpret" it. Neither partner is a mirror; each is another mind in the room, with their own responses — so the relationship itself becomes a sensing system.

Done well, leaders gain deeper clarity around what they are protecting, overusing, or avoiding — and which patterns of capacities, Autonomous or Relational or both, the edge is built around.

Practiced well, **Working the Edge** develops and disrupts the following:

WORKING THE EDGE DEVELOPS:	WORKING THE EDGE DISRUPTS:
Recognition of identity-protective strategies	Intellectualization at the expense of felt experience
Presence under discomfort or threat	Advice-giving without developmental friction
Loosening of familiar narratives	Holding to narrative certainty
Pattern recognition, rather than situation-reading	Using the partner as affirmation

In practice, this can look like:

- Share a moment from the past few weeks where your response did not match what the situation needed, or a decision you have been putting off.
- Ask what is repeating across conversations, not just what is happening in this one.
- Ask which capacity (or capacities) your partner may be over-relying on in their context, and which the situation may be asking for.
- When something feels certain too quickly, slow it down rather than accelerate it.
- Offer your perception directly ("what I'm noticing in how this is landing...") rather than staying in reflective summarization.
- Resist the impulse to resolve tension prematurely, especially when clarity feels close but slightly too clean.

Early partners describe edges; mature partners enter them. Early in a partnership, the edge may be located in one person's story. The other helps unpack it, clarify it, or extend it.

How maturity shifts the practice: Early partners describe edges; mature partners enter them. Early in a partnership, the edge may be located in one person's story. The other helps unpack it, clarify it, or extend it. The work is useful, but it still treats the pattern as something held by one person at a time. Mature partnerships attend not only to what is said but to the field between them — tension, silence, pacing, withdrawal, energy, resonance, defensiveness, and emotional movement. The relationship itself becomes data to explore.

“Solving complex global challenges requires moving past the illusion of the solo hero. By finding an intellectual mirror, stepping into intentional duality, and leaning into productive friction, leaders unlock the range necessary to transform systems from the inside out.
— Eva McLellan



3. EXPERIMENTING & RECALIBRATING

People don't change because they're told to do something differently. They change when they discover that doing something differently leads to better results.

Experimenting and Recalibrating is the practice of converting an edge into a lived experiment, and learning from it. Here, partners work together to design deliberate experiments that directly address the edges they've uncovered in real contexts, such as meetings, conversations, or decisions where the pattern usually plays out. In its simplest form, an experiment is the deliberate exercise of a capacity (or pattern) a leader does not yet reach for easily: chosen, named, and tried in a context where the old pattern would normally take over. Done well, experiments provide useful learning opportunities which, over time, help rewrite old narratives that have constrained integration.

Without sufficient experimentation, developmental work can become intellectually compelling but behaviorally unchanged. Experiments don't have to be grand gestures. A small, intentional shift is enough to provide data the partners can work with: pausing instead of rescuing, naming a disagreement openly, staying visible for five minutes longer than usual, or setting a boundary. Crucially, both partners experiment. This is not one leader running an action plan while the other observes. Each carries their own edge into the world between sessions, and each brings the data back.

Recalibration is what partners do with that data together, sharing what they learned and moving through what was noticed (e.g., bodily sensations, thoughts, reactions). The work is not whether the experiment "worked," but what it revealed about the underlying pattern. Over time, the experimental loop becomes less linear and more lived. The loop happens both inside sessions and between them, and the experiment is what carries the practice into life.

Practiced well, **Experimenting & Recalibrating** develops and disrupts the following:

EXPERIMENTING & RECALIBRATING DEVELOPS:	EXPERIMENTING & RECALIBRATING DISRUPTS:
Integration between insight and action	Preserving the leader's current self
Tolerance for discomfort and uncertainty	Outcome fixation
Embodied self-awareness and learning	Separating development from working life
Access to unused capacities under live pressure	Perfectionism or performative growth

In practice, this can look like:

- Choose a capacity you do not yet reach for easily and design the experiment around drawing on it, deliberately, in a moment where it would not normally appear.
- Choose situations where the edge is most likely to emerge.
- Design experiments that are small, specific, and contextual: a single conversation, a single meeting, a single decision. Not, "I'll be more direct this quarter."
- Decide in advance what you or your partner will pay attention to: body sensation, defensiveness, urgency, withdrawal, emotional reaction.
- Study what surprised you rather than what you achieved.

How maturity shifts the practice: Early partners come back with results; mature partners come back surprised. Early partnerships often treat experiments like assignments. Partners report whether they completed them successfully and move on. Mature partnerships use experiments to discover something they cannot yet see. They come back with surprises: reactions they didn't expect, resistances they surfaced, and the emotions beneath. The focus shifts from changing behavior to understanding the structures organizing that behavior.

PREPARING THE GROUND: THE INTEGRATED LEADERSHIP DIAGNOSTIC

The Power of Two practice works best when both partners arrive with a degree of within-work already in motion. Without it, the early sessions of a partnership are spent building the awareness that the practice will need anyway.

This is where the Integrated Leadership Diagnostic (ILD), alongside the wider

UNLOCKING EVE ecosystem of tools and practices, helps prepare the ground. It accelerates the within-work that makes between- and beyond-work possible.

Brought into a Power of Two partnership, the ILD helps create the fertile ground that accelerates the work. It gives both partners a starting point for honest conversation, a map of complementary differences, and a clearer sense of where the generative edges are likely to sit. Because each leader arrives with a clearer picture of their own patterns, they can orient to the edge more quickly, receive feedback with less defensiveness, and design experiments that respond to real developmental territory rather than surface-level goals.

The ILD is a snapshot, not a verdict. It captures a leader at a moment in time, in a particular context, and can be revisited as the context, or the leader, shifts. It can be shared with one or several partners, and the partnership may evolve through different stages of the developmental journey.

If you have completed the ILD, review your aperture before your first Power of Two session: the capacities you access most, the ones you avoid, and the places where your self-perception diverges from your partner's experience of you. These are likely to be your most generative edges. Share what you notice.

To learn more about the ILD, see our white paper,

[‘Are You an Integrated Leader?’](#) or visit unlockingeve.org.



The Power of Two Relationship

A RELATIONSHIP WITH A DEVELOPMENTAL PURPOSE

Leadership patterns and edges do not form in isolation. They emerge relationally through culture, family systems, organizations, rewards, and lived pressure. In these moments, leaders learn which parts of themselves create success, earn belonging, or feel safest under pressure. Over time, these patterns harden into narratives around identity. Certain capacities become over-developed and over-relied upon; others gradually fall out of reach. The aperture through which a leader meets the world narrows around what has worked.

Because these patterns are formed relationally, they are rarely transformed alone. What expands capacity, deepens identity, and moves leaders toward integration is sustained exposure to another person. Someone with enough difference to carry challenge, enough similarity to hold connection, and enough presence for something new to emerge between you.

In a Power of Two partnership, the relationship itself becomes a developmental field of integration. What begins as work within each leader becomes work between them and eventually moves beyond them, reaching into the systems they influence together. Over time, patterns once invisible become visible. Capacities once latent, most often the Autonomous or Relational territories a leader has under-accessed, begin to surface, rebalance, and gradually integrate.

The person you practice the Power of Two with matters as much as the practice itself. But not every close relationship becomes transformational in this way. Coaches, mentors, sponsors, peers, and therapists all serve important functions, and the Power of Two does not replace them. What is different about the Power of Two relationship is that it is reciprocal and oriented toward realizing a shared purpose. Both partners stand inside the developmental field at the same time: both bring their edges, receive and give challenge, hold accountability, while neither holding the role of expert or guide. It is precisely this mutuality, where the relationship itself is co-generated, rather than work pursued individually, that makes it capable of work the others are not designed to do. What it can make possible is something neither partner could create alone. A capability, an identity, sometimes a venture or shared body of work that then feeds back to expand who each of them is becoming.

Brought into a Power of Two partnership, the ILD helps create the fertile ground that accelerates the work. It gives both partners a starting point for honest conversation, a map of complementary differences, and a clearer sense of where the generative edges are likely to sit.

THE FIVE CONDITIONS THAT MAKE A POWER OF TWO RELATIONSHIP GENUINELY TRANSFORMATIONAL

These five conditions create the relational architecture through which transformation is catalyzed. Some of these conditions arrive with the relationship — gifts already in place when two leaders meet. Others are forged within it, built slowly through the practice and deepening of the relationship itself. When seeking a Power of Two partner, consider whether these conditions are already present between you — or could begin to emerge.



1. A WIDER RANGE BETWEEN YOU

Seek a partner whose ease is where your effort lives.

Development in partnership is catalyzed by difference. When two leaders default to the same capacities, they tend to arrive at the same conclusions and reinforce the same assumptions. They may mistake familiarity for growth while the partnership's developmental range narrows. It is not easy to see the patterns we are inside; we need another perspective, with enough difference to make them visible.

What matters is not which specific capacities differ, but that the partnership holds a wider range between the two leaders than either could hold alone. Two partners may share considerable overlap and still extend each other. What counts is the breadth of patterns and capacities across which, together, they operate naturally and comfortably. The most generative Power of Two partnerships are those where this combined range is wide: where one partner can inhabit what a moment calls for, and the other can pick it up when it is absent.

This matters because integration becomes more accessible alongside a partner whose ease is where your effort lives. Their fluency offers a map of your own expansion. Over time, exposure to that fluency begins to do its work. For example, where a partner moves instinctively toward decision and direction, the other learns to commit, to hold the line through discomfort; where a partner moves toward attunement and reflection, the other learns to pause, to sense, to stay open longer than is comfortable. What was once foreign becomes practiced, then internalized. First borrowed across the relationship, then carried within the leader.

When considering a Power of Two partner, reflect on the following questions: Do we extend each other's range, or do we mostly reinforce the same instincts? What does this leader do naturally that I reach for less readily, and what could I learn from them about where I might expand?

In a Power of Two partnership, the relationship itself becomes a developmental field of integration. What begins as work within each leader becomes work between them — and eventually moves beyond them, reaching into the systems they influence together.



2. A WILLINGNESS TO DO THE INNER WORK, AND REPAIR WHEN NEEDED

The same conditions that create expansion also create exposure.

The Power of Two is active, not passive. It asks both leaders to step repeatedly beyond the pull of familiar patterns, and to expose themselves to perspectives, capacities, and ways of leading that emerge from the relational field between them. For many leaders, this experience can be deeply energizing: they describe moments of insight, expansion, excitement, and relief as someone else helps them see what they could not see alone.

But the same conditions that create expansion also create exposure.

This relational field is designed to reveal edges, not reinforce comfort. As engagement deepens, leaders meet the edges of identity: their assumptions, defensiveness, and the limits of their current range. Partners are encouraged to hold each other accountable to these moments, without falling back into familiar patterns. Through the vulnerable act of exposing ourselves to another, insight and accountability can create moments of friction. Conversations can land badly, feedback can be mistaken for judgment, and the relationship can gradually narrow toward politeness, avoidance, or collapse.

What the Power of Two asks of us, beyond all this, is a continuous decision to remain open to growth: to stay present, especially when the breakthrough hasn't happened yet, and in moments where withdrawal feels easier. And when rupture does come, and in any sustained partnership it will, it asks them to come back, to name what tore, and to rebuild the conditions for honest contact, because something meaningful continues to emerge there. This requires a particular kind of inwardness. The conversation about the rupture is often one of the most developmental conversations the partnership will ever have.

When considering a Power of Two partner, reflect on the following questions: "Can they tell me something true, even if it is uncomfortable? Can I rely on them to stay present with me, even when it feels uncomfortable, tense, or disconnected?"

But the same conditions that create expansion also create exposure. This relational field is designed to reveal edges, not reinforce comfort.



3. A SHARED PURPOSE TOWARD SOMETHING BIGGER THAN ONESELF

Without purpose, the Power of Two is a mirror, not a threshold.

The Power of Two does not only shape what emerges within and between two people. It shapes what is brought into being beyond them. It is this final movement that gives the partnership its full meaning. Expanded capacity that stays contained within the relationship, however rich and meaningful, is only part of what a Power of Two is for. Its measure is whether what develops between two leaders ultimately moves beyond them into the systems, organizations, and communities they are trying

to shape. This is what distinguishes the Power of Two from even the most profound of partnerships: it is not only a crucible for personal transformation. It is a force for systemic change.

This is why shared purpose is what makes the partnership transformational. It orients the work and gives it direction. A common commitment to tackling something genuinely significant: a systemic challenge, a change that matters, or a future worth working toward. This provides the context in which growth becomes real rather than theoretical. It brings both leaders into sustained contact with consequence, complexity, and the kind of friction that actually transforms them and the system around them. The purpose is what keeps people coming back: not to the comfort of the relationship, but to the demands of the work, and to each other within those demands.

When shared purpose is absent, the partnership can lose its gravitational pull. Without something beyond the relationship to orient toward, leaders tend to circle back on what they already know, reinforcing existing strengths rather than developing new ones. The conversation stays rich but directionless. Support accumulates; movement does not. The Power of Two becomes, in effect, a very good mirror, when what it needs to be is a threshold.

When considering a Power of Two partner, reflect on the following question: “Is there a future we are both genuinely trying to bring into being? Something significant enough to hold us in productive contact with real conditions, real stakes, and each other?”



4. COMPARABLE LEADERSHIP WEIGHT

It is weight, not role, that makes the ground level.

For two leaders to share the developmental field, they must hold a similar leadership weight. Leadership weight is not accountability to something inside the relationship (e.g., growth), but accountability to something outside it: the scale of decisions you own, the depth of responsibility you hold, the kind of edges you are meeting. It matters because each leader must have a felt sense of what it costs to be the one responsible for the scale of challenge the other leader holds.

A Power of Two does not require identical roles, titles, or contexts.

Partnerships can span industries, geographies, and organizational structures. What it requires is that both partners carry the weight of comparable kinds of challenges. It is weight, not role, that makes the ground level. What creates equality of position is not shared context, but shared recognition of what is being required of each leader at their edge.

When leadership weight is mismatched, the relationship tends to collapse into mentoring or coaching. The leader with more weight becomes the

This is what distinguishes the Power of Two from even the most profound of partnerships: it is not only a crucible for personal transformation. It is a force for systemic change.

For two leaders to share the developmental field, they must hold a similar leadership weight.

one with answers; the leader with less weight becomes the one with questions. Both may grow, but only one is meeting their developmental edge, and the conversation flows in a single direction. Where the weight is comparable, the partnership can do something a mentoring relationship cannot: each partner can challenge the other from inside with the same kind of complexity. Power can move between them: one taking a more directive position in a given moment, the other receiving, without either becoming static. It is precisely this mutuality of stake that allows the partnership to remain generative rather than asymmetric.

When considering a Power of Two partner, reflect on the following question: “Can you imagine sharing your most demanding current challenge with them, and having them meet it with you? Not by having the answers, but by understanding, from the inside, what it costs to be the one holding it.”



5. AN IDENTITY STURDY ENOUGH TO BE EXPANDED

What is sturdy can be expanded; what is fragile is absorbed.

The Power of Two is best practiced by leaders who have done some within-work first. Before the between and beyond become fully accessible, a leader needs a working relationship with their own interior. This means having a sufficiently clear sense of who they are at their core: the beliefs they lead from, the values that orient them under pressure, the edges they are still growing toward. Because the Power of Two practice asks each leader to be genuinely changed and expanded, it requires a stable enough interior for that integration to take root.

A leader without sufficient individual groundedness may find the relationship absorbing rather than expanding, becoming a mirror without being mirrored, or drifting into a role that closes their own development: the therapist, the guide, the one who holds rather than the one who grows. Without a stable interior, the relationship has little foundation to build on. Each leader must be capable of integrating something new without losing what was already there.

The leader whose sense of self is sturdy enough to receive challenge without collapsing, and expansive enough to take on what the partnership is asking them to hold, does not merely survive the developmental field. They are enlarged by it. Identity itself is remade in the work. Not because the leader needed the relationship to tell them who they are, but because they were willing to let it expand who they are becoming.

When considering a Power of Two partner, reflect on the following question: “Do you both have a clear enough sense of your own beliefs, values, and leadership edges that you could be genuinely challenged by this relationship without needing it to tell you who you are?”

The Power of Two is best practiced by leaders who have done some within-work first. Before the between and beyond become fully accessible, a leader needs a working relationship with their own interior.

REFERENCE SHEET:

Choosing a Power of Two Partner

Choosing a Power of Two partner is one of the most important decisions in your developmental practice because it will shape the edges you meet, the capacities you strengthen, and the leader you become. This guide is a set of reflections designed to help you recognize the conditions that make a Power of Two partnership transformational.

WHAT IS A POWER OF TWO PARTNER?

A Power of Two partner is another leader who agrees to step inside the developmental field with you: bringing their own edges, receiving challenge, and committing to growth alongside you. It is mutual and reciprocal. Both partners are simultaneously inside the work: challenging inherited patterns, expanding leadership range, and practicing new ways of being. At its best, the partnership becomes a space where each leader helps the other access capacities that would be difficult to develop alone.

A Power of Two partner is not:

- Someone you need to impress
- Someone who rescues or manages you
- Someone permanently in mentor mode
- Someone unable to challenge you honestly
- Someone chosen only because they feel safe, familiar, or validating

WHO CAN BE YOUR POWER OF TWO PARTNER?

A Power of Two partner is not a fixed role, a title, or a person held for life. The conditions that make the partnership developmental can be carried by many people over your leadership journey, and often are. You may have one or several Power of Two partners,

and sometimes more than one at a time, each expanding a different part of your leadership range. What matters is whether the relationship creates the conditions for mutual growth, challenge, reflection, and integration. It only works if both people are willing to stand inside the developmental field together. That is a commitment you both make.

WHAT CONDITIONS MAKE A POWER OF TWO PARTNERSHIP WORK?

Not every close working relationship becomes developmental. The strongest partnerships tend to hold the following conditions:

- Enough difference to widen the range between you
- Comparable leadership weight and complexity, regardless of role or title
- Honest challenge alongside psychological safety
- Shared commitment to something larger than either person alone
- A willingness to remain present at the edge of discomfort, tension, and growth

None of this is mysterious or rare. A Power of Two partner is not someone you always need to go searching for. Often, it is someone already present in your leadership life, perhaps serving this role without the language for it.

It is worth pausing to reflect: Who already plays this role in your leadership, perhaps unnamed? And, who could you offer the same in return?

FIVE QUESTIONS WORTH ASKING

When reflecting on a Power of Two partnership, ask yourself the following questions.

- Does this leader naturally embody capacities I aspire to develop?
- Can we tell each other something true, even when it is uncomfortable?
- Are we both genuinely committed to becoming more integrated leaders?
- Do we carry comparable weight and complexity?

- Can they stay grounded in themselves without needing control, admiration, or agreement?

FINAL REFLECTION

Choose well. The right partner does not need to arrive fully formed, as many of these conditions can be cultivated together. What matters most is the orientation: two leaders willing to remain in the work together, especially when it becomes revealing, demanding, or uncomfortable. Seek someone who can meet you at your edge, stay grounded in their own center, and remain committed to something larger than the two of you. The rest is the work.

Interview Case Study: The Power of Two in Practice



EVA MCLELLAN



KAYE VITUG

EVA MCLELLAN & KAYE VITUG

Co-Founders of UNLOCKING EVE

A partnership built toward systemic change and healing the world.

Eva and Kaye met in 2019, at a moment when both were standing at significant edges in their leadership. Both were senior executives and strategic operators in healthcare — Eva as VP of Strategy in Belgium, Kaye as Head of Finance in the UK. Each was carrying responsibility not only for business performance but for leading deep cultural and systemic transformation within a global healthcare organization. The work was pioneering, the stakes were high, and both sensed it would require something different from them as leaders.

When a mutual colleague introduced them, they recognized something immediate. "It was frictionless," Kaye says, "it was different from any other connection I had made in fifteen years at the company." They understood each other immediately, and they were both operating at a comparable edge: between strength and openness, agency and reflection, ambition and service. What began as mutual support became something far more profound and developmental. They expanded each other's capacity, crediting this to the presence of the other. Over time, the partnership became a living expression of what they would later describe as Integrated Leadership through the practice of the Power of Two.

You become who you are because of each other. I am a very different leader today than I was five years ago — and I think it's because of this deep, intimate, developmental relationship, which has been more expansive than anything we could have done alone.

— Eva McLellan

EIGHTY-EIGHT KEYS

Complementary differences that expanded the full range of leadership

Eva and Kaye held a productive asymmetry. Eva brought strategic clarity, speed in decision-making, and a quality of generosity of spirit so natural it was magnetic. Kaye saw it clearly, named it as a superpower, and helped Eva unpack it. "She saw something in me that I just wasn't using consistently," Eva reflects. "Once she pointed it out, I was able to lean into it with confidence. Kaye could see something I was already using, but helped me apply it differently, and more powerfully, by reminding me: that's who you are."

For Kaye, the expansion moved in the opposite direction. Deeply intuitive, she had always accessed her leadership through sensing, patience, and listening depth. Eva's directness and clarity opened a new door for Kaye into capacities she already carried.

"She showed me a different way of accessing things I already had," Kaye says. "It's not that I didn't have the direct path, I just hadn't used it that way. Seeing her in action made me realize I could access it, too. Even when Eva wasn't in the room, I found myself asking: What would Eva do?"

Over time, what each saw in the other became integrated within themselves. Eva developed a deeper relationship with pause. Kaye cultivated greater capacity for direct action. Both describe it through the same image: there are eighty-eight keys on a piano, and this was a partnership that helped them realize they could play the full range.

ON THE EDGE TOGETHER

Vulnerability, recommitment, and the courage to keep choosing

A defining edge came not in conflict but in uncertainty. Six months in, mid-pandemic, having never met in person, both felt a pull toward something audacious: a foundation that would democratize leadership development across healthcare. Alongside the certainty came doubt. “Can you have certainty and doubt at the same time?” Eva asks, “It felt so certain. I could see it had already happened, like bringing the future into the present. And at the same time: is this hubris? What will you lose if you stand for something?”

What made it possible to move was that the doubt rarely arrived for both at once. This mechanism beneath the partnership held them: one could hold the ground while the other wavered, and then they would trade. “When I had those moments of questioning,” Eva says, “Kaye somehow did not. When she had the moments of questioning, somehow I was really grounded and sure.” Doubt, voiced to someone who could hold it, stopped being a threat and became part of how they moved forward together.

They formalized the commitment in the most embodied way available to them. Kaye flew to Belgium during lockdown, bringing her husband, because going all in meant bringing her whole support system. Over eight hours in a café, they sketched what would become UNLOCKING EVE and the vision has scarcely changed since. But the partnership has asked for moments of recommitment ever since: deliberate conversations to test whether it still holds, rather than taking it for granted. “You have to verbalize that commitment,” Kaye reflects. “If you’re ever doubting it, you just have to have a conversation about it. Don’t doubt it for more than forty-eight hours, because you need full commitment to do these breakthrough things.”

WHAT MADE IT POSSIBLE

Sturdy identity, shared purpose, and what partnership makes possible

Neither came to the relationship unformed. Eva had invested in years of deep leadership inner work as she climbed the ranks of global strategic and operational country GM leadership. Kaye was the same, and she carried a clarity about her own values that Eva still describes with admiration, “how well she knew herself, and how grounded she was in that is what inspired me.” These were not leaders looking to the relationship to tell them who they were. They were sturdy enough to be genuinely changed by it. What gave that change direction was a shared purpose: extraordinary developmental resources had shaped both of their careers, and they recognized how rare that was in a sector where most leaders, the overwhelming majority of them women, receive nothing like it. “Leadership equals lives saved,” as they put it. “Why isn’t this more democratized?”

What they describe, finally, is not two people helping each other but a third capacity that emerges between them: a range neither could reach alone, and which now functions almost as a shared instrument. “It’s a mirror that you see yourself in,” Kaye explains, “but also a mirror that makes you see something else.” Neither remained who they were when the partnership began. The work demanded versions of themselves they could not have reached on their own, and the relationship became the practice through which they reached them. “You become who you are because of each other,” Eva says. The purpose kept them honest, kept them growing, and kept them returning. Not to the comfort of the relationship, but to the demands of the work. “It’s a gift that keeps on giving. The more we looked, the more we found.”

“If you know that what you’re going to do is hard and extraordinary and really needs breakthrough, why would you want to do it alone? It’s more joyful, safer, expansive.” — Kaye Vitug

Interview Case Study: The Power of Two in Practice



BOB ANDERSON



BILL ADAMS

BILL ADAMS & BOB ANDERSON

Co-architects of The Leadership Circle. A partnership of more than thirty years.

The story of Leadership Circle is, in many ways, the story of two people learning to be in partnership, and being remade by it. When Bill and Bob first met, neither was looking for a partner, let alone a co-founder. Bob came from a world of deep intellectual, psychological, spiritual, and model-building work; by his own admission, he preferred the power of one. Bill was his temperamental opposite — gifted with an almost innate capacity for connection, formed early in a family that treated reaching across to a stranger as a genuine value and ethic. On their very first phone call, Bill was working to build a relationship; Bob was there to deliver insight and debrief an assessment. What grew between them over the years that followed reshaped not only the work they built, but who each became as a leader.

DIFFERENT GIFTS, ONE PURPOSE

Complementary differences in service of something larger than themselves

The complementarity between them was both strategic and structural. Bob had the theoretical depth, the model-building, the intellectual architecture that had taken years to construct. By the time Bob and Bill met, Bob had built a substantial international assessment company. In contrast, Bill had the business acumen, the relational reach, and what he describes as the ability to take exceptional work and get

the application done in a way that scales a business. As Bill puts it, “He had the mind and the practical experience. I brought the ability to scale it. We were both directionally similar in where we wanted to go, and coming at it from two completely different directions.” In Bill, Bob recognized something rare: a person who could accelerate scaling the work into the world. “He had strengths where I didn’t,” Bob reflects, “He had passions which I knew were important, but were not mine. And I brought something unique to Bill.” What each saw in the other was not a mirror but a possible extension of their own capacities.

What kept those differences generative and deepened them was a shared mission — leadership that elevates humanity — that Bill describes as something he was “all in on” from the first moment they worked together. “The mutual cement was big,” he says. Bob names it in almost identical terms: He describes it as the glue or the orienting force that aligned and held them in relationship to each other through every challenge: “We both knew we were in service of something bigger than ourselves, and that has been core to our relationship and to our business.” They were also, it turned out, born within ten days of each other in June 1955. “We felt like we came in to do this work together,” Bill reflects.

“He had strengths where I didn’t. And he had passions which I knew were important, but they were not my passions. We liked each other, and so we danced.” — Bob Anderson

DOING THE WORK — AGAIN AND AGAIN

Inner work, repair, and the capacity to return

A partnership of genuine difference in capacities does not always stay comfortable. Bill's orientation toward Autonomous drive and direction — "My identity was organized around I am my results, come hell or high water" — met Bob's preference for the power of one and a fusion of his identity with his ideas. "My identity was my results, and Bob was his ideas," Bill says plainly. These core patterns in identity ran deep within them. "We ran right up against that... it happened multiple times," Bill shared.

Over time, the relationship itself surfaced these patterns that neither could easily see in themselves, but they built enough trust to face them and share them. "We had to do our work," Bob says, distilling decades into a sentence. "We had to grow up and see our own assumptions, soften around them, learn to show up with greater integrity. And we did it because of the love that had developed between us and in service of something bigger." The growth did not happen despite the friction. It happened through it. When something ruptured between them, they would meet it, and they would come back together, often more honestly than before. "It opened up a door," Bob says of one such return, not only for himself, but for Bill. The healing and development ran both ways: one person's willingness to look at his own part freed the other to do the same, and neither could have reached it alone. These partnerships do not ask you to be flawless; they ask you to keep returning. "If you want to engage in a partnership like this," Bob says, "you have to be really honest about the challenges. But there is a huge reward."

SOMETHING DEEPER THAN TWO

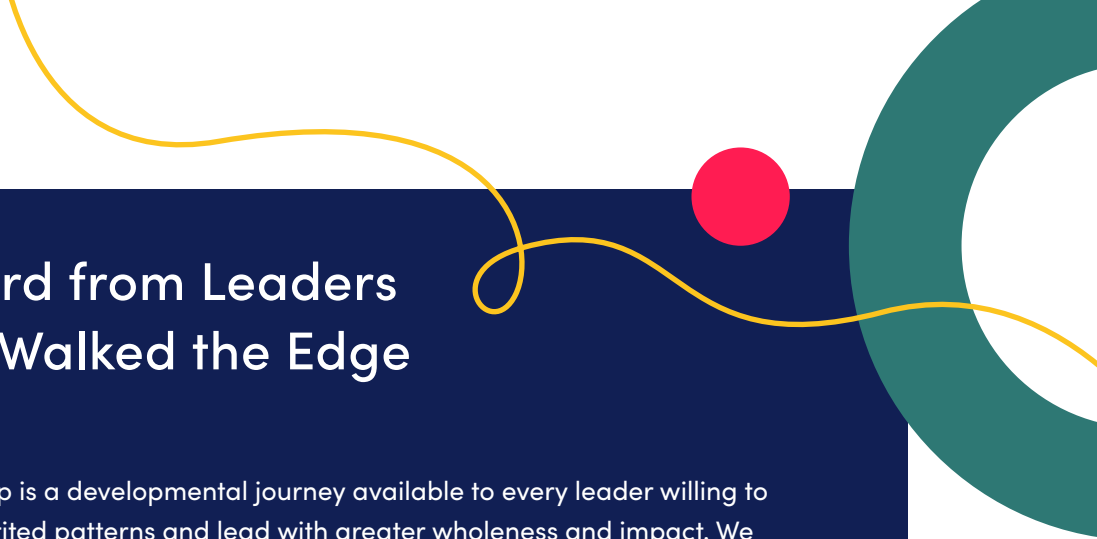
Reflections from the leaders themselves

Ask what the partnership has done to them, and neither talks about strategy. Bill talks about listening: "I'm 90% a better listener. I don't need to be right." He describes moving from a high-Autonomous, heroic leadership style to something built on genuine curiosity. Bob describes being on the receiving end of that gift, "when he's really listening, you feel wrapped in a warm bath."

For Bob, the partnership has revealed something even harder to articulate: to move beyond the power of one. For him, Bill modeled genuine synergistic collaboration: "Bill is one of the only few genuine thought partners I have. The conversations always spin up toward greater creativity and always toward places neither of us expected. I don't think I could be doing what I'm doing now without that. Bill has always been there championing me at the edge, especially when I was questioning the business relevance of what I was learning at that edge. Bill knows and supports that. I am following a mandate from the soul." In all this, each has been the other's teacher.

Neither remained who they were when the partnership began. The work demanded versions of themselves they could not have reached alone. The relationship became the practice through which they each grew, and the business results followed. "What we've been able to do together is something neither of us would ever have felt we could accomplish on our own," Bill says. "By a multiple." That is the invitation they make to other leaders: not that it is easy, but that it is worth it.

"What we've been able to do together is something neither of us would ever have felt we could accomplish on our own. By a multiple." – Bill Adams



A Final Word from Leaders who have Walked the Edge

Integrated Leadership is a developmental journey available to every leader willing to expand beyond inherited patterns and lead with greater wholeness and impact. We believe, in a world shaped by increasing complexity, the leaders who will create meaningful change are those who can hold strength and connection, clarity and compassion, agency and community in dynamic harmony. The purpose of our work is not simply to help others become better leaders, but to help heal the world — one capable of unlocking deeper potential within leaders themselves, between others, and across the systems they influence. As this new leadership paradigm continues to emerge, the question is no longer whether integration matters, but whether we are willing to cultivate it intentionally. The future of leadership will belong to those who can move beyond polarities and embody the expanded range, wisdom, and humanity that this moment in history demands.

We leave you with the wisdom of those already walking this path. Across our global cohorts, integrated leaders consistently reminded us that transformation does not begin with perfection, certainty, or status. It begins with awareness, courage, and practice. We leave you with their advice below.

KNOW YOURSELF FIRST. The biggest treasure in leadership is within you. Take the time to understand yourself better: your style, your strengths, what you lack, how you land on others. Self-awareness is not a soft skill. It is the foundation everything else is built on.

BALANCE THE HEAD AND THE HEART. Be mindful of your Autonomous and Relational qualities and what each brings. Use both when making decisions. A good decision, more than one leader noted, is one you can feel: there is peace of mind and a calm heart.

TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS AND KEEP GOING. Your instincts are gold. Learn to create from them. Embrace change, take your pauses, reflect — but keep going. It can be scary. It will be worth it.

SEEK DIFFERENCE. Find your Power of Two. Connect with others whose styles and perspectives challenge your own. Engage with changemakers. Find a partner and connect frequently. Understand what you bring, recognize what you lack, and trust that others will step up to complement your work.

REFLECT WITHOUT JUDGING. Be consciously aware of how you showed up. Spend time observing, not evaluating. With consistent practice, integration stops being something you do and becomes something you are.

AND START NOW. Not when conditions are right. Now.

Data drawn from UNLOCKING EVE pilot cohorts (n = 34).

ABOUT THE RESEARCH TEAM

UNLOCKING EVE

The Unlocking Eve Foundation, co-founded by healthcare leaders Eva McLellan and Kaye Vitug, was born from the unwavering belief that enabling new models of balanced and Integrated Leadership is essential to transform healthcare and heal the world. At the heart of their work is a dual mission: to advance a new profile of leadership excellence and to accelerate women's advancement in healthcare leadership by 50%. UNLOCKING EVE aims to impact 100 million lives by 2030 through thought leadership, compelling research, transformative tools, and high-impact partnerships for system change. Learn more about our mission here: <https://www.unlockingeve.org/>

LEADERSHIP CIRCLE

At Leadership Circle, we believe every leader is capable of becoming extraordinary. We've designed our solutions to help leaders thrive and reinvent themselves and their organizations amid volatile, ever-changing conditions. We've built our assessments upon the Universal Model of Leadership, which integrates the field of leadership, and our global community consists of best-in-class leadership coaches and consultants. Together, our data-backed tools and extensive network of experts help individual leaders, teams, and organizations lead effectively around the globe. Read more about Leadership Circle and our tools for assessing leadership effectiveness here: <https://leadershipcircle.com/>



Eva McLellan

Co-founder, UNLOCKING EVE



Kaye Vitug

Co-founder, UNLOCKING EVE



Adam Kitt, Ph.D.

Lead Researcher, Leadership Circle & UNLOCKING EVE



Lani Van Dusen, Ph.D.

Managing Director, Research and Assessment, Leadership Circle



Steve Athey

Senior Partner and Principal, Leadership Circle

