

CAREY LOHRENZ

— BE FEARLESS —



THE 2025 NATIONAL STUDY OF

WHY FOCUS ON

SPAN OF  
CONTROL

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*The biggest challenge, and opportunity, of the moment is learning **how** we can overcome our circumstances instead of being overwhelmed by them.”*

— Carey Lohrenz

# INTRODUCTION

The 2025 National Study of Why Focus On The Span Of Control is a comprehensive study that started as a passion of mine to uncover new, missing data on leading with confidence in an era of remarkable uncertainty.

These insights have never been more valuable for organizations navigating today's turbulent waters.

Leaders everywhere recognize the future is increasingly uncertain and unpredictable. Since COVID-19, uncertainty now governs decisions, behaviors, and performance across the U.S. and worldwide.

Organizations face new problems without clear solutions. In this climate, leaders seek guidance on how to learn, adapt, and thrive in our evolving reality.

In short, leaders of all ages, titles, occupations, and experiences seek ways to learn, navigate, and lead in this new post-pandemic reality.

But what specific knowledge, practices, and actions do leaders need to achieve their potential and drive results?

This national study aimed to uncover practical, empowering insights so leaders at every level can lead with greater confidence and impact.

This is the kind of helpful data leaders have wanted but not found—until now.

We are committed to providing the latest insights on leadership excellence and high performance, enabling you to build effective, influential organizations.

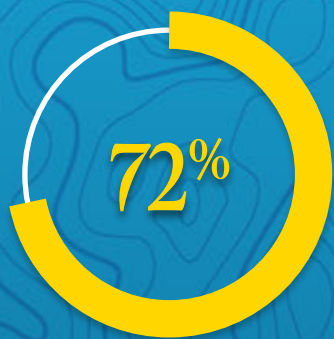
Welcome to the 2025 National Study of Why Focus On The Span Of Control. We're excited for you to explore our findings.

Your partner in leadership,



**Carey Lohrenz**, Founder and CEO  
Carey Lohrenz Enterprises  
Author of 2 WSJ Bestsellers:  
*Fearless Leadership*, and *Span of Control*





72% of all Working Americans would take more risks if they were more confident overall

A major opportunity emerging from uncertainty is learning to overcome challenges instead of being overwhelmed by them. My book, *Span of Control*, focuses on how leaders can achieve high performance in a variety of environments and situations, from work and personal lives to tackling market competition and new organizational threats.

Everything outside your Span of Control can distract from solving problems and achieving goals—leading to overwhelm and task saturation.

The national study and this special report explored the Span of Control framework to bring new data and a deeper perspective to each of the three key components by asking questions related to each of them, but from a research-based perspective:



**FOCUS** on what matters most



**FORMULATE** a flight plan for success



**COMMUNICATE** what's possible

The first Span of Control area the national study explored was a focus on confidence.

Confidence is critical to each step in the Span of Control framework, and the study findings should garner concern from every leader and organization.

Our national study found that **72%** of all Working Americans would **take more risks if they were more confident overall**.

Confidence is critical at every step of effective leadership and organizational success. Leaders have the ability to either build confidence steadily over time or chip away at confidence through inaction and poor leadership approaches.

When employees lack adequate confidence within an organization, it can lead to numerous detrimental outcomes that negatively impact virtually every aspect of operations **and** culture:

### POOR DECISION-MAKING

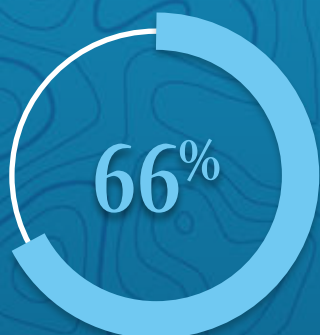
Employees low in confidence often struggle to make decisive choices, especially under uncertain or challenging conditions. They may end up second-guessing themselves or falling into “analysis paralysis,” unable to move forward confidently. This indecisiveness can stall progress, reduce efficiency, and hinder performance.

### INEFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

For those in leadership roles, a lack of confidence can impair their ability to lead groups, teams, divisions, and entire organizations. Leaders without confidence may struggle to inspire their team, manage effectively, or set a compelling, clear vision for the company's future. This void in leadership will be felt widely, and can also frustrate colleagues who end up unable to rely on these leaders to deliver results.



**54% of all Working Americans** report often feeling overwhelmed at work



**66% of Gen Z** say they have experienced higher stress due to burnout at work over the past year

## LIMITED GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

When employees lack confidence, they may shy away from advancement opportunities, taking professional risks, or committing to personal development outside their comfort zone. Their fear of failure or avoidance of discomfort can severely restrict professional and personal growth. It also limits the organization's ability to develop talent and evolve.

Confidence amongst team members is integral for a thriving organizational culture of engagement, learning, innovation, and productivity.

There are specific steps leaders can take to boost confidence, including detailed preparation, clear goal-setting, and mental and physical rehearsals of processes and desired outcomes.

**Detailed, consistent preparation:** Investing the time to prepare increases confidence, digs into the details, and creates an understanding of the steps and components that boost the confidence of those taking action.

**Better goal setting:** Unclear or murky goals lead to confusion, lack of understanding, and decreased confidence by making team members feel like they don't know what success looks like and therefore are more likely to fail. Better goals inspire clarity and confidence through alignment and understanding.

**Mental rehearsal or process visualization:** One of the often-overlooked ways to increase confidence is for leaders to help their teams rehearse mentally and physically for the work to be undertaken. This can include visualizing the steps, process, obstacles, and outcomes and then working through each of them to the right conclusion. Physical rehearsal can be role-playing what is to happen and the desired outcomes to build muscle memory and corresponding confidence that comes with aligned practice.

With confident individuals and teams, an organization gains empowered talent willing to take smart risks and actualize their potential. Leadership plays a profound role in fostering confidence.

## OVERWHELM AND STRESS WIDESPREAD

Overwhelm and stress at work directly impact focus, planning, and communication leading to all kinds of breakdowns.

The national study uncovered a concerning trend—**54% of all Working Americans report often feeling overwhelmed at work.**

Looking generationally, **66%** of Gen Z (18-26) say they have experienced higher stress due to burnout at work over the past year. This was the highest percentage of any generation.

Additionally, 61% of women say they have experienced higher stress because of burnout at work over the past year, **a significantly higher percentage than men at 55%.**

*Address stress, overwhelm, and employee burnout proactively and consistently:*



Wellness Programs



Supportive Culture



Mental Health Resources



Equitable Work Practices



Balancing Expectations

**These findings signal a broader leadership and organizational culture issue that requires attention.**

Prolonged feelings of stress, overwhelm, and burnout can lead to serious mental and physical health problems, including depression, cardiovascular disease, and weakened immune function. It also reduces productivity, performance, accountability, and engagement.

In *Span of Control*, workplace wellness is a crucial area for leaders to support, and it directly improves employees feeling overwhelmed, stressed, and burned out.

**The data also suggests women may be juggling more responsibilities both at work and home, encountering more workplace stressors like unequal treatment, or managing unbalanced expectations.**

Addressing this gender disparity is critical for organizations to thrive not only in periods of uncertainty but in any period as women increasingly advance in the workforce.

The data also suggests that younger employees, particularly those from Generation Z, are experiencing higher levels of work-related stress and burnout.

This could indicate a need for businesses to reconsider their orientation, onboarding, management practices, and support systems to better address the needs and expectations of younger generations. **This is particularly critical if organizations want to retain and develop younger generations as their emerging leaders and future workforce guides.**

Ultimately, stress, overwhelm, and burnout often stems from a lack of support, understanding, resources, and empathy from those around the person feeling overwhelmed—**which amounts to a leadership problem.**

Their colleagues, teammates, and direct reports are not only being exposed and likely affected by the stress and overwhelm but also by the demoralization that comes from feeling like one's basic work needs are not being met.

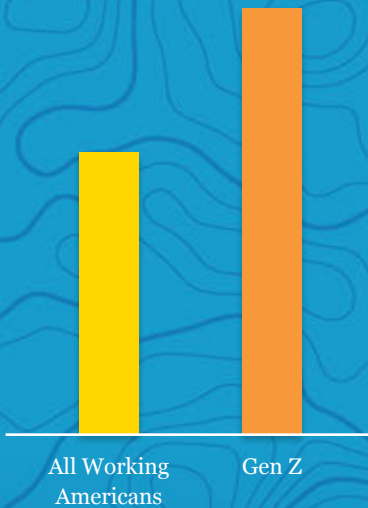
For all these reasons, it's crucial for leaders and organizations to address stress, overwhelm, and employee burnout proactively and consistently.

This can include:

- ☒ Implementing wellness programs for employees at all levels,
- ☒ Fostering a supportive culture where people feel safe asking for help,
- ☒ Providing mental health resources,
- ☒ Ensuring equitable work practices across genders and generations,
- ☒ Realistic balancing of work expectations with employees' bandwidth



### Working from Home is More Stressful



Lack of clear planning and objectives can hinder performance and accountability.

## STRESS CROSSING WORK LOCATIONS

Besides the stress of working within an organization, where people physically work can also create additional stress, uncertainty, or challenges.

Even with more workplace flexibility, working from home can be stressful for many Americans.

In fact, 33% of all Working Americans say working from home is more stressful to them than going into an office or shared workspace—and that number jumps to 50% for Gen Z (18-26)! This insight starkly contrasts a common media narrative that working from home universally reduces stress.

This is an important insight for leaders to realize that simply giving employees the option to work from home doesn't mean their employees' work experience is automatically better or less stressful, but that it creates its own stress amidst a different physical experience.

In addition to *where* a person works, how they approach work also creates alignment, or a lack thereof, that can grow over time.

## PLANNING LACKING

One of the best ways to support alignment is to have clear objectives at work.

**But, the national study revealed that having a clear plan and objectives was not as common as one might expect.**

The national study uncovered that **50%** of Working Americans report that they do not have a 30, 60, or 90-day work outlining their objectives and desired results.

**That means half of everyone in the workforce today doesn't have a defined focus on what they are supposed to achieve in the next one to three months.**

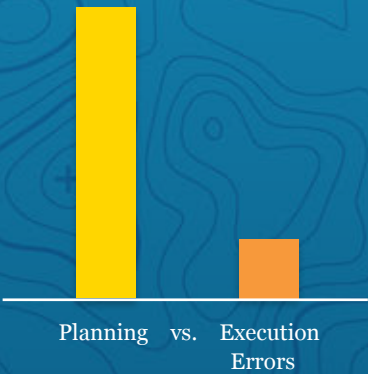
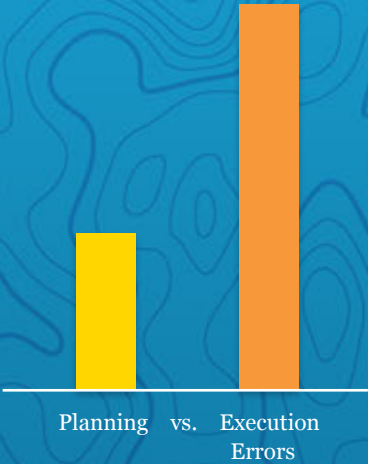
This absence of planning impacts:

-  Performance
-  Alignment
-  Teamwork
-  Achieving critical goals

**Investing the time to plan is one of the most important ways leaders can create a culture of alignment, continuous learning, and pursuing excellence even in extremely challenging conditions.**

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*Often, even a small, dedicated amount of effective planning can save a ton of execution errors down the road.*



The experience of clarifying, agreeing upon, and then being able to measure progress is important for team members to track their progress and make decisions as well as for leaders to be able to confirm every team member is on the right track, **confidently**—or provide help and resources if they are not.

However, there are many common reasons that leaders do not invest the time to plan and work with their team on individual plans and priorities. Common excuses that surface from leaders include:

*Everyone knows our strategy.*

*We don't need to plan. We are a creative group and need flexibility.*

*Strategy? Planning? Ugh! That happens behind closed doors.*

*We're too busy doing the work of running the company.*

Underneath these common excuses to avoid planning is the reality that many leaders don't understand the value of planning, they don't know how to do it, or they want immediate gratification—they want the payoff, and they want it now.

However, this commonly held attitude by leadership can hold an organization and its performance back. Often, even a small, dedicated amount of effective planning can save a ton of execution errors down the road.

Interestingly, while the outcome of planning is extremely valuable, the planning process is as important as the outcome because when everyone is involved, the result is both understanding and buy-in of the plan created.

The absence of a clear, structured plan on an individual level can significantly impact a team's work performance and, by extension, the overall performance of an organization. Here are three reasons why planning matters:

### 1. CLEAR GOALS AND DIRECTION

A plan provides a roadmap toward achieving agreed-upon objectives. It offers clear goals, the steps needed to reach them, and a timeframe in which to do so. Without this clarity, employees may struggle to understand what they are working towards and how their individual tasks contribute to broader organizational goals.

## 2. EFFICIENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

A well-crafted plan serves as a guide that can help individuals manage their time effectively, prioritize tasks, and allocate resources efficiently. This can significantly boost productivity and ensure that important tasks are not overlooked. Conversely, the absence of a plan can lead to inefficiency, missed deadlines, and wasted resources.

## 3. MOTIVATION

Plans often provide milestones that can motivate employees as they work towards achieving them. Without a plan, employees may feel lost, less motivated, and unsure about their role within the organization.

As leaders work to foster a great culture, tap into their team's potential, and drive innovation in a time of uncertainty, organizations must commit to planning and goal setting and provide the necessary tools and training to facilitate this.

**Remember, the national study found that half of Working Americans did not have a 30, 60, or 90-day plan to meet their objectives at work!**

**Especially amid uncertainty, organizations must commit to planning and providing the necessary training and tools. Thoughtful planning pays dividends by saving significant headaches down the road.**

Another important lesson from the study builds on planning, and delivering the “right” amount of, and approach to, leadership and management.

## THE LEADERSHIP DISCONNECT

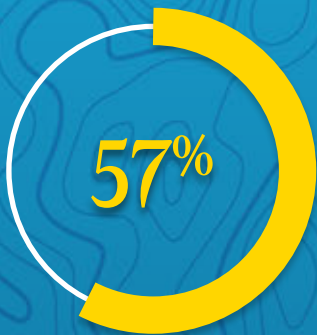
The national study revealed over half (56%) of Working Americans feel micromanaged by their leaders.

Further, **57% of Working Americans say their leadership team avoids transparency.**

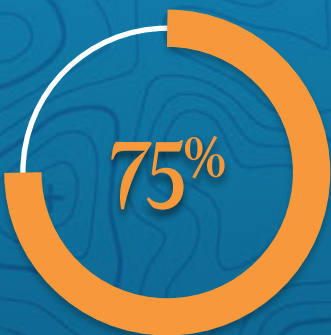
Whether micromanaging, avoiding transparency, or a combination of both, the reality is that these leadership approaches **do not effectively build the culture of trust, personal accountability, and high performance that organizations critically need.**

Additionally, while **75% of Working Americans agree failure is a critical part of their success journey**, 36% say **their leadership team does not support the vulnerability and mistakes required for innovation.**

The intersection between leaders micro-managing and lacking transparency vs. team members feeling a conflict between needing to fail as part of the innovation process yet not being supported to take the risks that might result in failure en route to innovation paints a picture of Working America navigating a tricky work reality.



**57% of Working Americans** say their leadership team avoids transparency



**75% of Working Americans** agree failure is a critical part of their success journey



The research data suggests a significant disconnect between employees' need to be trusted and empowered to perform their best, and leaders not supporting the role of failure in innovation and the support needed to take the risks that lead to breakthroughs.

The negative impact of this leadership dynamic is less innovation and experimentation, lower risk, and a culture of playing it safe.

This disconnect is ultimately quite costly when other competitors in the same market **are taking the risks necessary to move forward.**

Here are three actions leaders can take to better navigate the potential for micro-managing, lacking transparency, and supporting the risk of failure necessary for innovation:

### 1. COURAGE AND CANDOR

Leaders need to model courage and candor by taking calculated risks and being open about mistakes made on the path of progress. This action encourages a culture of learning from failures.

### 2. LEADING WITH INTEGRITY

Trust is built on honesty, integrity, and personal responsibility in the workplace. Leaders need to model the integrity they want from employees and take personal responsibility for their actions and results. This helps build trust without micromanaging others.

### 3. REINFORCING TEAMWORK

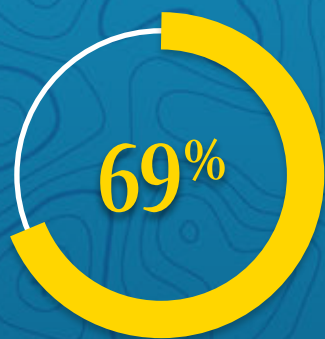
Effective leaders share problem-solving responsibility across teams versus trying to solve every challenge alone. This reduces overall risk in an organization and reinforces teamwork.

With the right leadership balance of empowerment, support for smart risk-taking, and accountability, employees will feel inspired to help the organization succeed. This is particularly important when we consider what the study found when it came to continuous learning.

## CONTINUOUS LEARNING CULTURE LACKING

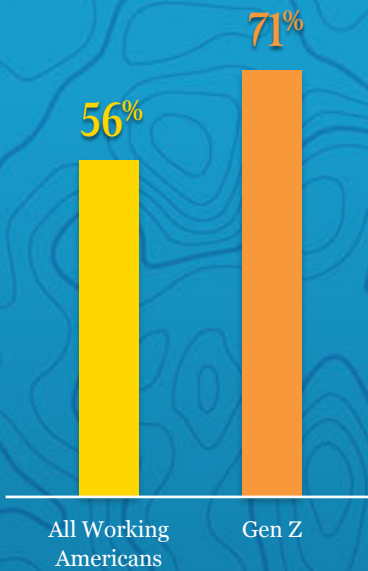
**31% of Working Americans say their workplace lacks an ongoing culture of continuous learning, growth, and adapting. Without focus in this area, organizations risk stagnation.**

However, **69%** of Working Americans believe their company currently supports continuous learning—a strong foundation from which to build for the leaders ready to go from learning to leadership and high performance!



**69% of Working Americans** believe their company currently supports continuous learning

*Willing To Settle  
For Something  
'Less Than'...  
Because It Feels  
Safe*



## THE CHALLENGE OF DIMINISHED EXPECTATIONS

**I saved this research discovery to be the last one in this white paper because it is both a cautionary tale and a clear call to action.**

In the current climate, inspiring innovation, teamwork, and new thinking is more essential than ever. This is because expectations have notably declined.

The national study found that **56%** of Working Americans say they are now more willing to settle for something 'less than' what they wanted only two years ago... because it feels safe—and that number jumps to a staggering **71%** for Gen Z (18-26)!

This means that the majority of all workers in the U.S. are willing to settle for less coming out of the pandemic.

**This “settling” is a hidden risk factor in businesses large and small, non-profit organizations, and every company and leader that aspires for growth and greatness.**

**Settling for less, rather than striving for one’s potential, risks disengaged, ambivalent employees, stalled innovation and creativity, and the turnover of ambitious talent.**

Leaders must proactively address this challenge of diminished expectations.

When individuals are willing to settle for less, especially less than they were only two(!) years ago, this trend can lead to significant downsides.

Two areas are particularly vulnerable for individuals who settle: **career development** and a **lost commitment to learning**.

When people settle for less, especially Gen Z, who are very early in their careers, they may become unwilling to take the risks necessary to advance their careers, seek opportunities, take on new challenges, and find out what they can do in their career and as a result, create an unnecessarily low ceiling for their future.

These same individuals can also not commit to learning because they are settling for less and, as a result, avoid the situations, experiences, and learning programs that amplify their talent and put a future that is possible within reach.

The impact on organizations is even more stark when settling for less takes hold of their workforce.

Innovation and risk-taking immediately become much less of a priority and this can result in everything from lost sales and market share to lost creativity and drive.

In addition, losing that zest for the future by “settling for less” can also make a company and its culture become stale, risk-averse, and feel both stuck in the past **and** limiting for those who do want to move forward.

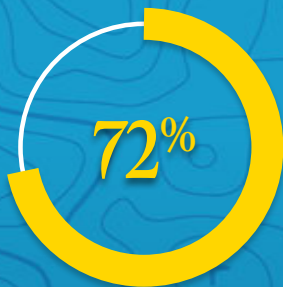
The result can be a turnover of ambitious employees and a loss of excitement in recruiting, which can become a cycle of mediocrity that is hard to escape.



**This discovery means that leaders need to be aware that workers choosing to settle for less than their goals from only two years ago, is now unexpectedly pervasive within the U.S. workforce, and something leaders must actively address so as not to derail their success.**

This is especially urgent and important for engaging younger employees, who will make up a significant proportion of the workforce in the coming years—and eventually become managers and leaders!

## KEY FINDINGS AND ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS: WHAT EMPLOYERS CAN DO



72% would take more risks if they were more confident.



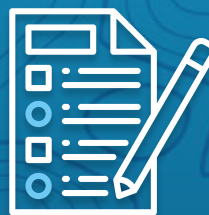
50% don't have a 30, 60, or 90-day plan for their work objectives.



56% feel micromanaged, and 57% say leadership avoids transparency.



1. Build confidence through clear goal-setting and skill development.



2. Implement a consistent planning process to align objectives and drive accountability.



3. Empower employees with autonomy and transparency.





## RESEARCH STUDY SERIES CONCLUSIONS: THE TIME IS NOW

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*Panic-stricken people do not make good decisions, nor do they inspire confidence in their team. In times of crisis, change, and uncertainty, focus on your Span of Control.”*

— Carey Lohrenz

The world has transformed dramatically in recent years. Most leaders were not ready. Most employees were not ready. Most organizations were not ready. Now is the time to dive deep and find research-driven truth in the current experience, unmet needs, and leadership priorities. Results matter now more than ever.

This national study series revealed numerous shocking discoveries, important insights, actionable data points, and key trends that leaders must act on immediately.

The findings touch on every aspect of culture, performance, leadership, wellness, innovation, goal setting, planning, and outcomes.

Leading a study of this depth and complexity was a major undertaking. But the discoveries are incredibly valuable for strategic decisions to drive the organization forward through uncertainty.

One thing is clear: **leadership grounded in data and insights is critical.**

This is why I lead this global work, write books, speak, and advise leaders worldwide.

Together we can use this data and these discoveries to create the plans, strategies, and approaches enabling fearless leadership and optimizing your Span of Control.

I'm committed to these goals and am excited to provide this study at no cost, so you can implement these findings for real results.

Reach out to see how we can work together to drive the results you and your organization need right now. Together we have the experience, expertise, and now the data to lead in uncertain times for outcomes you can rely on.

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## THREE ACTIONS TO LEAD FEARLESSLY AND TAP INTO YOUR SPAN OF CONTROL



Download your free chapters from Fearless Leadership and Span of Control here: [careylohrenz.com/free-chapters/](https://careylohrenz.com/free-chapters/)



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Contact my team for an in-person keynote or leadership program at [CareyLohrenz.com](https://CareyLohrenz.com) or [BookCarey@CareyLohrenz.com](mailto:BookCarey@CareyLohrenz.com)



## OUR TAKEAWAY: FEARLESS LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

To thrive in uncertainty, organizations must prioritize fearless leadership at all levels. This research report series reveals a roadmap for building confidence, fostering psychological safety, and optimizing Span of Control™.

By investing in employee development, embracing smart risks, and leading with transparency, organizations can navigate disruption and achieve high performance.

The time for fearless leadership is now.

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### NATIONAL STUDY METHODOLOGY

The 2025 National Study of Navigating Uncertainty, Challenge, and Thriving Through Change was conducted in partnership with, and fielded by an independent research firm. The custom research study included a total of 1,003 U.S. participants ages 18-65, who are currently employed full-time, part-time, or actively looking for work.

The study is weighted to the 2020 U.S. Census for age, region, gender, and ethnicity. The research study was conducted online from October 18, 2023, to November 7, 2023. The total sample of 1,003 has a margin of error of +/-3.1 percentage points.

# CAREY LOHRENZ

— BE FEARLESS —



## ABOUT CAREY LOHRENZ

### FIGHTER PILOT, BESTSELLING AUTHOR, KEYNOTE SPEAKER

As one of the first female F-14 Tomcat fighter pilots in the U.S. Navy, Carey Lohrenz knows firsthand how inconsistent execution can generate catastrophic results in high-stakes, fast-moving environments.

Lohrenz has translated her pressure-tested leadership and strategy experience to help business leaders thrive in today's competitive business environments. Lohrenz has appeared on CNN, MSNBC, NBC, CBS, ABC, and NPR, and in Vanity Fair, Inc., Time, Huffington Post, and more, and has delivered her high-impact keynotes and programs to thousands of Forbes Global 2000, Fortune 500, and other companies worldwide.

A CEO, board member, business owner, and mom to four kids, Lohrenz inspires individuals and teams how to summon the courage, tenacity, and agility required to execute with excellence amidst adversity. By following her approach, they learn to navigate complexity, lead change, and deliver results when it matters most.

## CAREY'S BESTSELLING BOOKS

### FEARLESS LEADERSHIP



In “Fearless Leadership: High Performance Lessons from the Flight Deck,” she walks readers through the three fundamentals a leader must possess to exhibit real fearlessness: courage, tenacity, and integrity. Lohrenz then reveals what fearless leadership looks like in action, offering advice on how to set a bold vision, bring the team together (as wingmen, not Top Gun Mavericks), execute effectively, and stay resilient through hard times. Whether they're stepping into their first leadership role or looking to get out of a longstanding rut, readers will find this resource to act like an afterburner, rocketing them to ever-higher levels of performance.

### SPAN OF CONTROL



In Span of Control, Lohrenz picks up right where Fearless Leadership left off—encouraging readers to develop resilience for facing hard times. Span of Control offers a collection of moving stories, actionable tools, and opportunities for reader reflection, all of which can be applied immediately in businesses, on teams, and in readers' personal lives. The central tenet of this book—that we focus our attention and effort explicitly and relentlessly on a limited number of priorities that we can, and should, control—offers a clear path out of the chaos and overwhelm that can accompany our biggest challenges and our moments of greatest distress.

## FOR MORE TOOLS, RESOURCES, AND MEDIA INQUIRIES CONTACT US



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