

LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM THE  
**CAPE BUFFALO**



AND YOUR GUIDE

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On your safari, in your jeep, one “peep” is the driver. The rest are passengers. The question is: Who is the safari *leader*?

Who leads Cape buffalo herds in Tanzania?  
Who determines the focus and direction?  
How do they communicate it to the herd?

The answers to these questions may surprise you and may help you recognize, identify, and honor your real safari leaders. (Notice I did not say those answers may help you *choose* the leaders of your safari; I said they may help you recognize, identify, and honor them.)

Fact is, a driver and a leader are not always the same. You may have hired a peep and given them the keys to the safari jeep, but other peeps in the jeep may actually be leading your safari. Oftentimes, these peeps are the quiet ones. Perhaps older, perhaps more experienced, maybe wiser, more focused. They likely have been quietly guiding your safari for years... just as do the “pathfinders” in the Cape buffalo herds on the Tanzanian plains.

These “pathfinders”—the members of the herd who strongly influence the herd’s direction—are not typically traditional alpha leaders. They can be any herd member who has a strong sense of purpose and vision. They are usually older, experienced buffalo moms focused on survival and success of the herd, which in turn protects their calves, and they know where to find food, water, and safety.

When the time comes for the herd to move to new feeding grounds, these pathfinders know it. They stand up, stretch, move about a bit, then lie back down... but they don't lie down any ol' way. They lie down facing a specific direction in a specific way, maintaining a specific focus.

*And others in the herd notice.*

What are the pathfinders doing? They've been living in the Serengeti for years. They know when it's time to move. They are focused on where they will find their next source of food and water, and where the danger is along the way. Soon, others start looking where the pathfinders are looking and adjust their own position accordingly. Before long, most of the herd, including the alpha leaders, are aligned with the direction and intention of these unassuming pathfinders. Soon the entire herd will get to their feet and move in the direction the pathfinders are focused on.

The herd survives and succeeds because these pathfinders, without title or authority, communicate their wisdom simply by focusing on and aligning with what is important to themselves, their young, and the herd. While not generally recognized as herd leaders, they are leaders, nevertheless. The instincts, experience, and clarity of focus of these unassuming (but dedicated) pathfinders move the herd in the right direction.

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Working in human resources analytics, as a professional actuary, I discovered that leaders of truly successful organizations get peeps in their safari jeeps who have more than just skills, knowledge, and abilities (traditionally called “SKAs”). They seek out and hire pathfinders, and create cultures where they are recognized, appreciated, and honored.

How about you? Do you know who your pathfinders are? Who are the peeps in your jeep who may not have any official title of leadership (and may not even aspire to such) but are keenly focused on your vision and mission and are dedicated to the success of your safari? Do you and your leadership team respect and appreciate their wisdom, experience, and values?

Perhaps quiet and unassuming, your pathfinders' constant focus on your goals, mission and vision, and their personal dedication to helping your teams achieve such, is vital to the success of your safari. Do you seek them out? Make a point of engaging them in decision making and strategy development? Encourage them to speak up and make their perspective known? If you really listened to them, what do you think they would say?

Having the right peeps in your jeep is mission critical. “The right peeps” includes your pathfinders who have the experience and insight that keep you on mission—on purpose.

Safari Dude out.



***“How about you?  
Do you know who  
your pathfinders are?”***

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# MEET YOUR GUIDE



**Steve Fredlund** is the Safari Dude. He is an award-winning keynote speaker, two-time TEDx presenter, and bestselling author of *Do the Unright Thing: Memoir of a People Pleaser*.

As a professional actuary in human resources analytics, he uncovered surprising factors that enhance employee engagement, and work enjoyment—key elements for effectiveness, retention, productivity, and organizational success. He uses this insight to guide audiences to get the right peeps in their jeep (and in the right seats!).

With more than three decades of experience as an actuary, executive leader, entrepreneur, and nonprofit founder, Steve has a rare combination of analytical rigor, real-world leadership experience, and engaging storytelling.

Known for his warmth, laugh-out-loud humor, and ability to make complex ideas practical and relatable, Steve equips audiences to keep moving forward with confidence, purpose, and momentum. He has inspired audiences across Fortune 500 companies, associations, healthcare systems, nonprofits, and global leadership conferences.



*"Great storyteller."*

- Renee Lawler,  
Minnesota Bankers  
Association

*"We will hire him  
again."*

- Bill Eshleman,  
Costco

*"Excellent session that  
resonated deeply."*

- Deb Stueven,  
RBC Wealth Management

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