



STEVE FREDLUND

THE SAFARI DUDE



Leadership Lessons from the Cape Buffalo

by Steve Fredlund, The Safari Dude



On your safari, one peep drives the jeep. The rest of the peeps in your jeeps are passengers. Who is the leader? Is it the driver? A passenger? Which of the peeps in your jeeps are the real safari leaders? Peeps you choose to lead – or peeps who choose themselves to lead – and may have been leading your safari for years – *whether you knew it or not!*

Who leads Cape buffalo herds in Tanzania?
Who determines their 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 – the peeps actually leading the peeps in your jeeps. Now, 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, you likely did not actually choose your real safari leaders – certainly not all of them. You may have run a “peeps wanted” ad, hired someone who seemed to fill the bill, and gave that peep the keys to safari jeep. However, though you may have assigned this particular peep to drive the jeep, other peeps in that jeep may actually be leading your safari. Often 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” – members of the herd who strongly influence the direction of the herd – are not typically traditional alpha leaders. They may have no inherent position or power – or any inclination to jostle for such. They can be any herd member who has a strong sense of direction and purpose. They are usually older, experienced buffalo moms focused on survival and success of the herd which protects their calves – and they know where to find food, water and safety.

When the time comes for the herd to move forward 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.*

Edited by Thomas Cantrell, a peep in my jeep, this article is intended for distribution on the SteveFredlund.com website.

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What are they 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 off in the direction the pathfinders are focused on.

The herd survives and succeeds because these pathfinders, mostly older experienced moms with babies, 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, clarity of focus of these unassuming, but dedicated, pathfinders move the herd in the right direction.

Working in human resources analytics, as a professional actuary, I discovered that leaders of truly successful organizations get peeps in their safari jeeps with more than just skill, knowledge, and ability [traditionally called “SKAs”]. They seek out and hire *pathfinders* – and create cultures where they are recognized, appreciated, honored.

How about you? Do you know who your pathfinders are? Who are the peeps in your jeeps 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, expertise, values?

Perhaps quiet and unassuming, your pathfinders' constant focus on your goals, mission and vision, and their *personal* devotion and dedication to helping your teams actually 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 jeeps 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.



The Safari Dude and the Positive Peeps in his Jeep

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About the Author



Steve Fredlund is The Safari Dude. As a professional actuary in human resources analytics, he uncovered surprising factors that enhance employee engagement, *and work enjoyment*; key elements for effectiveness, enhanced retention, productivity, and organizational success.

Minnesota to Rwanda, nonprofit to corporate, start-ups to Fortune 500 companies he brings to your event thirty years of leadership success. Steve's personal safari mission is to help great leaders and their teams enjoy an epic safari *by getting the right peeps in their jeeps and in the right seats.*

Call USA 01 651.587.5435 and invite Steve to deliver his keynote, ***"Happiness is: The Right Peeps in Our Jeeps"*** at your next event. Discover leadership lessons from the savanna and build leadership teams who transform your workplace from tired to inspired. Your peeps in your jeeps will enjoy an exciting safari experience and return to work reenergized, refocused and rededicated. No longer just employees, they will be your *pathfinders!*

Amazing message! Held the attention of all 300 employees. (Bill Eshleman, Costco) • Steve masterfully combines the analytical, practical and humorous. (Greta Nelson, ECFE) • Steve knows how to deliver! (Mark Coughlin, Our Response) • Navigates complex topics with ease. Imparts groundbreaking ideas with charm and subtlety. "Cold rooms" become charged with purpose. Changed my life! (Shaun Johnson, The Big Band Experience & Tonic Sol-fa) • Steve is a charismatic visionary. I strongly recommend him to any organization that needs transformation, and innovation (Laura Smith, HR Consultant) • Connected at a deep level, leaving us with a feeling of fulfillment and possibilities (Dan Larson, Lake Fellowship)



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LET'S GET THE RIGHT PEEPS IN OUR JEEPS

QUICK START GUIDE



Leadership is an epic adventure as you build a team that increases your success and happiness.

SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS
NONPROFIT EXECUTIVES

COMMUNITY INFLUENCERS
CORPORATE LEADERS

HAPPINESS IS: THE RIGHT PEEPS IN OUR JEEPS!



STEVE FREDLUND

THE SAFARI DUDE

SteveFredlund.com
Steve@SteveFredlund.com
651.587.5435

Leading an organization or team is filled with ups and downs, highs and lows, knowns and unknowns – times of excitement and stress and boredom. Leading this adventure is very similar to leading an African safari.



Serengeti National Park, Tanzania, 2013

As amazing and inspiring as a safari is, it is a serious adventure – and an adventure worth taking seriously – because the safari is taking place in a serious place. The Serengeti is surreal, filled with once-in-a-lifetime opportunities and the potential to experience things very few ever will. But it's also a wild game preserve, which means the game rules – the animals rule. It is 12,000 square miles of raw nature where big cats and hungry hippos roam free.

Many leaders take their team into the Serengeti without a clear understanding of what they want to experience, or without a strong approach to making that happen, or with team members who are not right for this safari. The result is safari leaders who are frustrated, discouraged, defeated, lonely; they become filled with self-doubt wondering if they have what it takes to be a safari leader. They are overwhelmed, burnt out and sometimes even miserable. They question if it is possible to be both a leader and be happy.

On the other hand, leaders with a clear vision, optimal strategies and the right people are flourishing; they are invigorated! The top is down and the wind is blowing through their hair (or where their hair used to be). There are smiles and high-fives throughout the jeeps; the excitement is palpable.

What do you want from leading your safari? Do you want to move from frustration to invigoration? Study this Guide, make a few changes, and you will be on your way to a more epic adventure!



Volcanoes National Park, Rwanda, 2015

What do you think of when you first think of an African safari? Driving through the Serengeti in Tanzania looking for lions while you take in landscapes filled with acacia trees, elephants and giraffes? This is what most people think of – and it is certainly an option.

But did you know you can have a safari where you use machetes to chop your own path through a volcanic rainforest in Rwanda to spend an hour with mountain gorillas? Or take boat rides in Kenya to look for Nile crocodiles? Or jump in a canoe and paddle to the bottom of the Lake Victoria waterfall in Zambia to say hello to the hippos? Or take a hot air balloon ride over the Maasai Mara in Kenya? Or go horse riding in Botswana? Or go mountain biking in Uganda? Or go through guide training in South Africa?

Like leading an African safari, we have endless opportunities for the experience we want to have leading our team or organization. Many leaders accept the default for leadership – the Serengeti safari – without realizing there are so many different options. What is the safari experience you want to have? Not the one you “should” have – not the one people “expect” you to have – not the “default” that is the way it has been done before. What is the safari experience YOU want to have? YOU are the leader; YOU get to choose.

Many leaders become frustrated because their business, organization, team or movement is not what they want. But as we look back on their safari journey, the root cause is that they weren't clear on the front-end about what they wanted. Their strategies were not designed to achieve an ultimate vision; their team members were not chosen to be aligned to some overarching objective. So the strategies were suboptimal and the people were largely unproductive and disengaged – if they even stuck around.

“Even if you know where you are going, any road will get you there.” This paraphrased insight from Alice in Wonderland is so true of leadership. Even if you know where you are trying to go, there is no guarantee you will get there – but you will have a far better chance of creating strategies and building a team that will advance toward that vision. And you will have less frustration and more happiness in the pursuit.



Akagera National Park, Rwanda, 2011

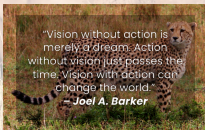
How important is your mission? How serious are you about seeing your vision fulfilled? Does your mission and vision really matter to you? Or, like some of your team members, are you simply going through the motions – just cashing a paycheck – grinding your way to another weekend – making it through another year – your focus firmly fixed on your magic retirement age?

There are an infinite number of potential strategies for every organization, even for the smallest teams and straightforward business models. The effectiveness of potential strategies varies wildly and is typically related to how much effort is put into refining strategies to optimize them for the specific objectives of the organization.

Leaders who are ambivalent about their vision settle for “**A** solution.” Passionate leaders pursue “**THE** solution.”

Many leaders and organizations fail because of a lackluster approach to developing strategies; this is true within Fortune 500 companies, small businesses, entrepreneurial endeavors, nonprofits, community groups, government and education. Over and over, Steve Fredlund has seen compelling and important visions left unfulfilled because of an inadequate approach to strategy development. That is too much potential left unrealized.

Strategy optimization is an iterative process that requires curiosity, creativity and innovation; it requires learning from the past while also eliminating the perspective that limits options to what has been done before.



Maasi Mara, Kenya, 2013

A powerful vision is required to have an epic adventure; but it is not sufficient. Without optimal strategies, even the most compelling, world-impacting visions will not be achieved. Just like we cannot just come up with a great idea and expect it to happen. How often have you heard about a new business come into your community and thrive, followed by people declaring, “That was my idea!” and even sometimes “They stole my idea!” These are people that for ten years have been sharing what a great idea it is, but never developing a strategy to make it happen.

Have a clear and compelling vision. Layer in optimal strategies. Change the world!

Great visions are not accomplished in isolation – they are accomplished by a team of people fully aligned with the vision and deeply passionate about carrying out the strategies that will get them there. Leaders can have a powerful vision and optimal strategies, but without a team of the right people aligned to that vision carrying out those strategies, the leader will be stuck on their journey; their adventure will be frustrating.



Kivuruga, Rwanda, 2009

Most leaders and organizations are hiring the wrong people. They focus on finding people with the skills, knowledge and abilities that can accomplish the group of tasks that have been bundled together into a job description.

These leaders bring in people who are not necessarily aligned with the vision or connected to the mission; they bring in people with the right experience and resume.



Akagera National Park, Rwanda 2011

This is the standard process – and the standard process creates terrible results. Research shows that the average U.S. office worker is productive only 31% of their day, that only 36% of employees are considered engaged in their job, and that 25% of employees will voluntarily leave their job in any given year. This has a massive negative impact on the finances and impact of these organizations; and it has a massive negative impact on the success and happiness of the leader.

RIGHT PEOPLE

It's terrible to be passionate about a vision only to have others on your team that don't seem to care; they are the "wrong peeps in your jeep" for your safari. They check their phones while the rest of the team is looking for lions; they complain about their outfit getting dirty while witnessing the great migration.

As leaders, we are looking for team members to be productive, engaged and stick around – the three most critical people-based factors that drive organizational results.

But what leads to productivity, engagement and retention? The research is clear (the Safari Dude is an actuary after all) that these are driven by employees who are aligned with the vision, passionate about the mission, operating in their strengths, connected with their teammates and feel like they are part of something bigger than themselves.

Those who are aligned and connected are more productive, engaged and stick around longer, which is what ultimately drives leader success and happiness.

Leaders who don't understand mission alignment talk about hiring as a "numbers game" where you just keep hiring and hiring and over time you will get the right people. Or when managers try to get people who are aligned with vision, mission and values by layering on a few leading questions during the interview: "Do you agree with our values? Does our vision excite you?" – What are they going to say? You laugh, but this happens way more than you can imagine.

There is a massive disjoint between the people we need for our epic adventure and our current process for team building. We hire for skills, knowledge and abilities when we need to emphasize alignment with the vision and mission.



Akagera National Park, Rwanda, 2011

Why do our processes continue to be focused on skills, knowledge and abilities? Not just because "we have always done it that way" but because it is easier to automate and justify our decisions. There's just one problem with that system – it doesn't work! It never has and it never will.

So how can we get the "right peeps in our jeeps"?

If we start recruiting when we have an opening, we are too late.



Ibyiwacu Cultural Village, Rwanda, 2011

When we have an open seat in the jeep we should already have a community of potential team members who have been identified as deeply aligned with our vision, mission and values. We will no longer spend our efforts searching for candidates and hoping they are aligned – we go into our aligned community and find those with the skills we need. It is possible we may need to provide some supplemental training for those who need it, but it is far easier (and less expensive) to upskill employees than to manage a jeep full of peeps who are unproductive, disengaged and have high turnover.

How do we build this community? Through a rallying cry and a place for people to gather.

While the mission statement is very important to the strategic decision-making of an organization, it evokes an intellectual response and is far too long and complicated to be remembered and shared. The rallying cry supplements the mission statement; it is much shorter (no more than five words) and evokes an emotional response; it can be remembered, shared and rallied behind.

Through this rallying cry, we invite people to join the movement; to become part of something bigger than themselves; to be part of the "collective we"; to belong to a mutually caring group of people powered by a compelling vision. We just need a palace for them to gather, which can be physical or online – and we don't need to overly manage this; instead we watch for those who are so passionate that they put their time, energy and skills into enhancing and growing the community.

This Quick Start Guide is designed to provide you with a new way to think about the most critical foundational elements to make your leadership adventure more epic.

Below is your three-part Epic Adventure Checklist. Look it over and assess your leadership. What do you still need? Where are the gaps? What needs more focus?

You are invited to reach out to Steve Fredlund, the Safari Dude, to ask questions, get recommendations for other resources, or discuss the possibility of coaching, training or speaking at an event.

CLEAR VISION

- Success:** How do you authentically define your success?
- Happiness:** Do you understand what truly makes you happy?
- Mission:** What are you trying to accomplish? Why does your team exist?
- Vision:** What is the picture of your preferred future state?
- Values:** What is important to you? How do you want things to get done?

RIGHT PEOPLE

- Alignment:** Are your people fully aligned with your mission? Are they engaged in solving problems that are not their job?
- Connection:** Is your team deeply connected with each other? Is there a sense of belonging? Is there mutual care and respect?
- Selection:** Are you focused more on alignment with vision than with skills, knowledge and abilities?
- Rallying Cry:** Do you have a short & memorable mantra that evokes an emotional response?
- Gathering Place:** Do you have somewhere passionate people can connect around your vision?
- Support Team:** Do you have external peeps in your jeep who provide insights and encouragement? Perhaps a business networking group, chamber of commerce, leadership coach or mastermind?



Ngorongoro Crater, Tanzania, 2013

OPTIMAL STRATEGIES

- Know the Opportunities:** Who and what are on your side? Where could you see success? What are your unique assets?
- Know the Challenges:** What things stand in your way? What are the obstacles and constraints? Who will provide resistance? What risks do you face?
- Optimized Strategies:** What are the strategies that will optimize achievement of every element of the Clear Vision? Have you been creative and innovative?
- Ownership:** Have you built ownership (internally and externally) around your vision and your strategies? Are people using collective language such as "we" and "our"?



Tarangire National Park, Tanzania, 2009

MEET YOUR GUIDE

"Steve Fredlund is the only actuary -- in the history of actuaries -- you actually WANT to sit next to at a dinner party!"

This declaration by a finance leader is a testament to Steve's diverse and successful background. His impact has been felt by individuals, small businesses, nonprofits and Fortune 500 companies from Minnesota to Europe to Africa.



Ibyiwacu Cultural Village, Rwanda, 2015

Steve's accomplishments include Thrivent Financial's employee of the year, inventor of a retirement income strategy and two-time TEDx speaker. He has been the founder and leader of three nonprofits, four small businesses and two Fortune 500 business units. Steve earned his Masters in Business Administration and fellowship in the Society of Actuaries.

When not speaking or coaching, Steve can be found playing disc golf, trying to win a poker tournament and doing the best he can to stay a loyal Minnesota sports fan.



Keynote presentation, 2022

As an award-winning actuary, Steve's analysis of human resources data uncovered the surprising drivers of employee motivation. This breakthrough is transforming how businesses recruit, hire and onboard new team members. The impact has been staggering.

Steve's revolutionary team-building approach has radically improved employee productivity, engagement and retention – making him a highly sought-after leadership coach and speaker.

After leading six African safaris, Steve became known as "The Safari Dude." His experiences form the foundation for his "Epic Adventure" leadership model. Steve's riveting stories from the savannah profoundly drive home his paradigm-shifting perspectives on team-building to help leaders become reinvigorated on their "safari."



Volcanoes National Park, Rwanda, 2015

TAKE THE NEXT STEP

CONNECT WITH STEVE TODAY



STEVE FREDLUND

THE SAFARI DUDE

SteveFredlund.com

Steve@SteveFredlund.com

651.587.5435