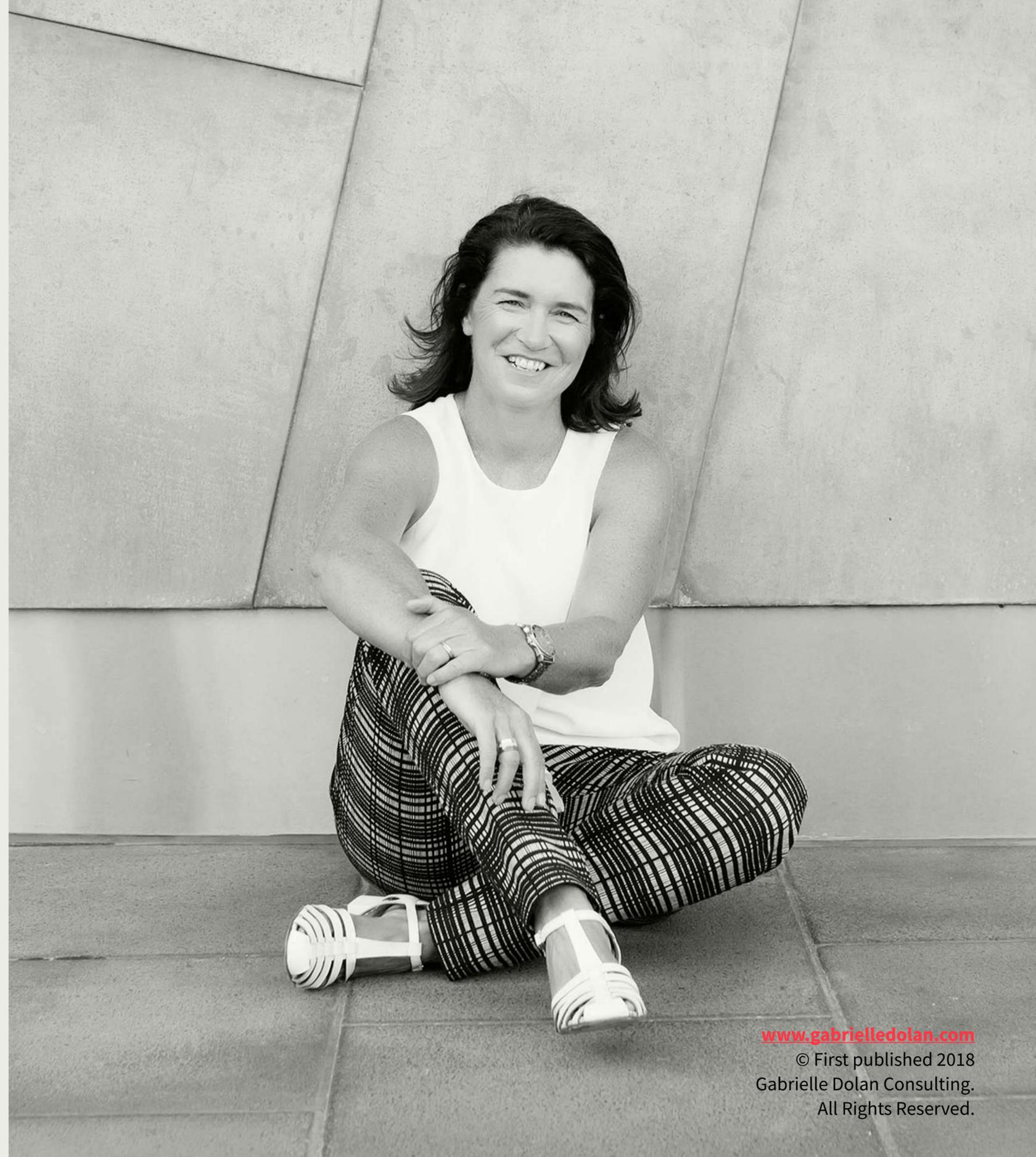


Gabrielle Dolan

Demystifying Thought Leadership

What is it? The benefits and how to implement it.



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Definitions of Thought Leadership

Mention the term Thought Leadership to people and you will receive some varied responses. From ‘we are already doing it’ to ‘it’s just a fad’. From my experience, the most common response is one of confusion in understanding what Thought Leadership means and the benefits it can bring to companies.

A quick Google search will provide pages of definitions for Thought Leadership. Joel Kurtzman, former editor-in-chief for the magazine ‘Strategy and Business’, first coined the term in 1994. It was he who said that Thought Leaders are those people who possess a distinctively original idea, a unique point of view, or an unprecedented insight into their industry.

One definition that is useful comes from marketing blogger of Symantec and Apple fame, Elise Bauer. She says that Thought Leadership is the recognition from the outside world that the company deeply understands its business, the needs of its customers and the broader marketplace in which it operates.

She goes on to describe the key attributes of a Thought Leader. For her, these include a spirit of generosity, the ability to cultivate communication with the press, write prolifically, speak often and build an online presence around key ideas.

Matt Church, the founder of Thought Leaders states that "Thought Leadership is the missing link between strategy, customers and employees. It's about taking the implicit know-how in a business and making it explicit. With it you can win the race to the future, the battle for attention and the war on talent."

When individuals and companies do this strategically and effectively they can experience significant benefits.



Benefits of Thought Leadership

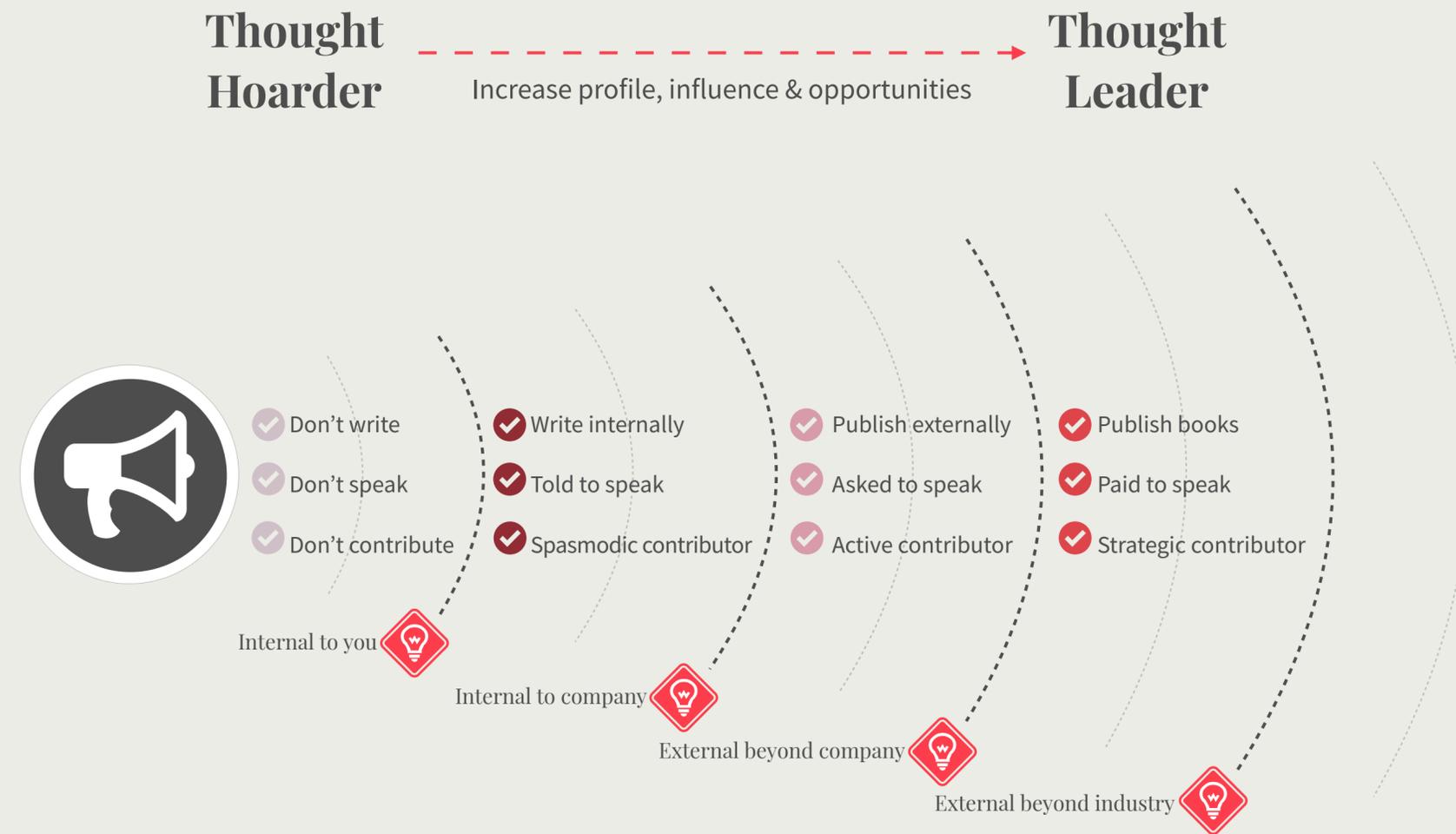
The main benefit of Thought Leadership is that it increases the individual's profile and by default the company they work for. However, it is not just a professional branding exercise that will influence the status of individuals and the company. Elevating the profile of selected individuals around what the company wants to be known for has a direct benefit in three main areas.

Increased sales – Becoming increasingly renowned through Thought Leadership has a direct result on increased sales in existing markets and new markets. This is a direct result of you generously sharing interesting, unique and valuable content.

Increased influence - As Thought Leaders become more recognised as the expert in their field, their ideas and opinions carry greater weight. Thus allowing them to increase their influence internal within their own organisation and externally to the wider industry

Increased opportunity – Many Thought Leaders enjoy increased opportunities as their profile increases. This can vary from being invited to speak at events (internally and externally), educate their fellow employees as well as opportunities to break into new markets.

The benefits stated above occur when companies make a decision to elevate their current Subject Matter Experts into Thought Leaders. The model below helps establish where Subject Matter Experts are positioned along the spectrum of Thought Hoarder to Thought Leader.





For example, many Subject Matter Experts fail to write, speak or contribute on professional social media sites such as LinkedIn about their area of expertise. There are many reasons why this occurs but three common causes are fear or lack of confidence, not valuing their knowledge and being unable to articulate their ideas. In this case, the Subject Matter Expert may have great ideas but they are hoarding them in their own head.

Like most continuums, the majority of Subject Matter Experts find themselves somewhere in the middle. It may be that they are often told or asked to speak (mostly internally) or their contributions to professional social media sites are spasmodic. Moving them further along the continuum from Thought Hoarders to Thought Leaders takes a strategic approach and investment.





Identifying your potential Thought Leaders

Potential Thought Leaders are usually seen as either Subject Matter Experts, passionate advocates for what they love or both. In your organisation they may be the CEO or members of the senior leadership team but they do not always need to be the highest-ranking people. Two of the biggest indicators for success as a Thought Leader are a passion for the chosen subject matter and a commitment to do the work required.

Once a company has identified what they want to be known for, which is in line with their strategic direction, they can then identify the most appropriate people to become Thought Leaders. The next step is to provide the training and support to help them capture and develop their thoughts as well as communicate them to a broader market.



Five steps to implementation

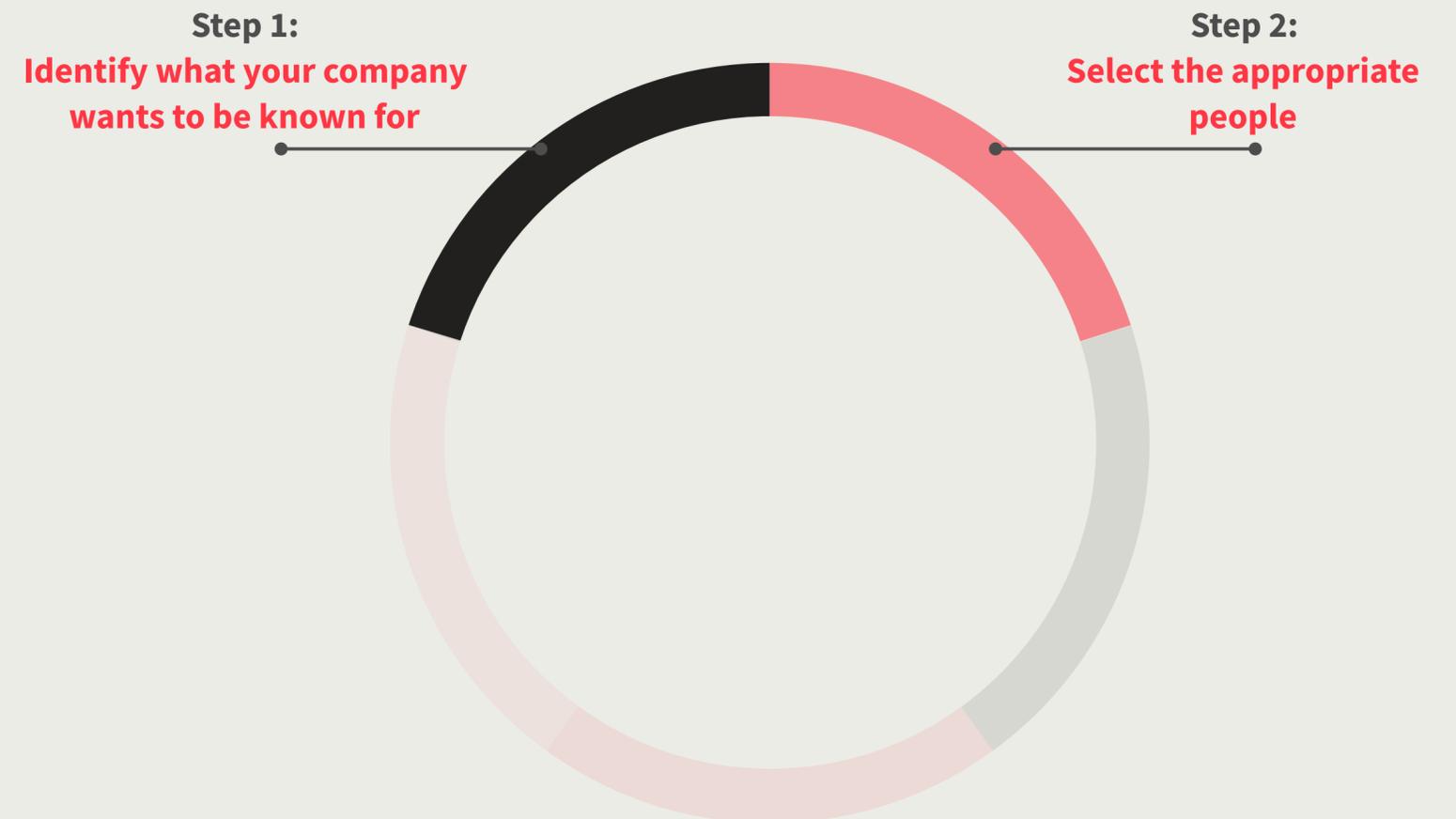
For those companies serious about implementing Thought Leadership, the 5-step process outlined below is recommended.

Step 1: Identify what your company wants to be known for.

This will be a combination of your strategy, values and purpose. For larger organisations, this may be department specific. For example, many companies are looking at Thought Leadership specifically for their digital and innovations areas.

Step 2: Select the appropriate people.

Once a company has identified what they want to be known for, they need to select the most appropriate people to raise the company's profile in those areas. In selecting people, companies should look at the individual's current expertise in their area, as well as their potential to speak, write and contribute on the topic and their passion for the subject.





Step 3: Invest in their development

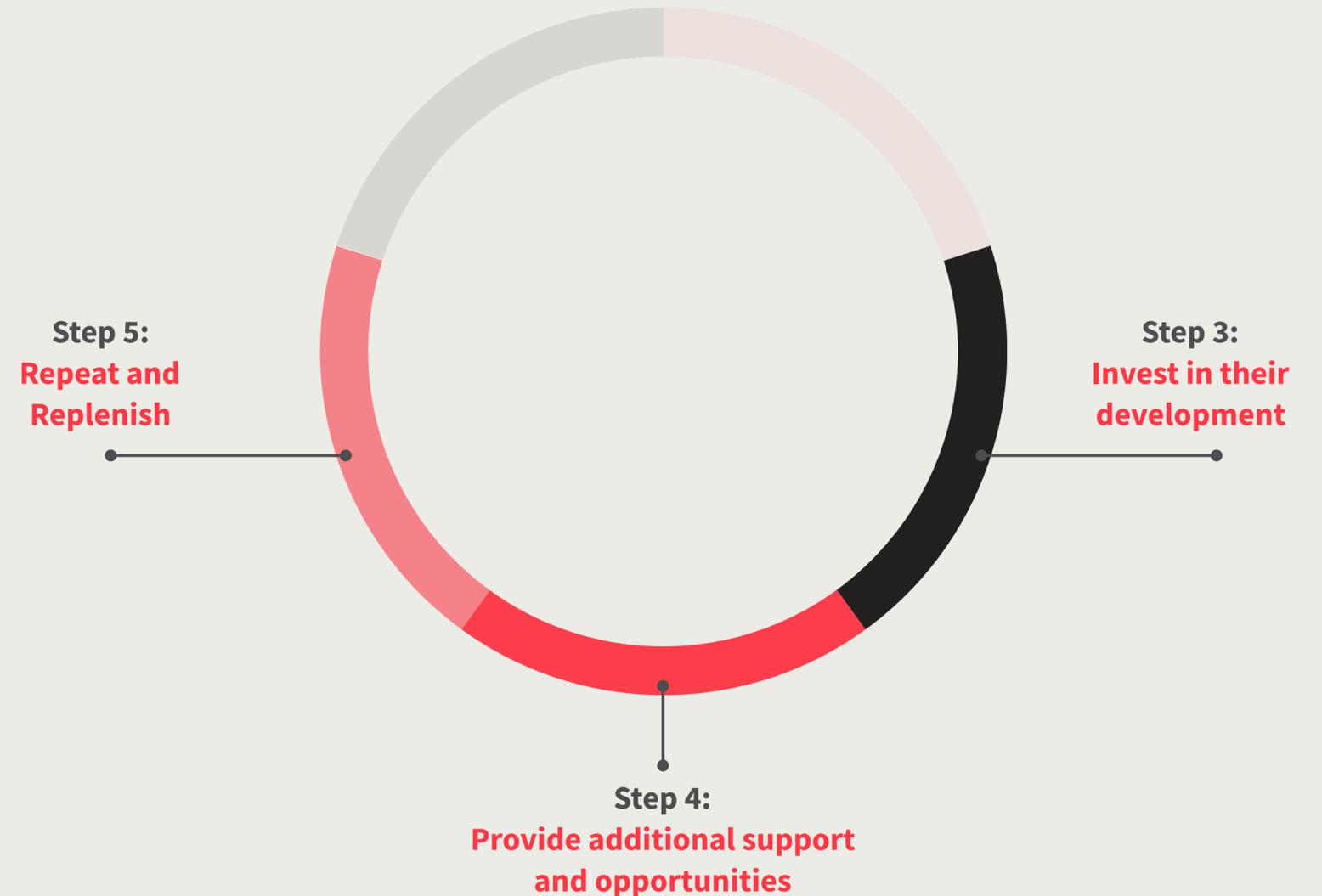
Once individuals have been selected they need to be trained in how to develop and broaden their thinking. This skill allows them to present their ideas at a conceptual level through models and metaphors and a context level through research and stories. Undertaking this process gives them the capability and confidence to step into their Thought Leadership.

Step 4: Provide additional support and opportunities

To maximise the initial time and financial investment in developing Thought Leaders, companies need to provide ongoing support and opportunities. For example, some Thought Leaders may require additional presentation or media training. Aim to provide opportunities for the Thought Leader that add value to employees and customers. For example, conduct lunch and learns or educational events based on a certain topic and invite relevant employees or customers.

Step 5: Repeat and Replenish

Over time a company's strategy will change and through natural transition, employees leave. It is important for companies to continually add to their pool of Thought Leaders. Implementing Thought Leadership is not a one-off intervention. It is an ongoing process to develop your talented people, add value to your customers and be a frontrunner in the market place. Some of my clients position the Thought Leadership program as their annual flagship leadership development program for their talented and high potential employees.



Five Common Mistakes

-  **Self proclaimed without substance** – Some companies do little more than call themselves Thought Leaders, which can have a negative effect on brand and industry influence.
-  **Out sourcing content** – Engaging in researchers and writers to publish articles on behalf of an individual, normally the CEO.
-  **Not selecting the right people** – Only choosing the most senior leaders in the company, which are not necessarily the best people to be your selected Thought Leaders.
-  **Cart before the horse** – Many companies provide their potential Thought Leaders with presentation and social media training without instructing them on how to develop their ideas into valuable content.
-  **Not providing ongoing support** – Once selected and trained, Thought Leaders need to be provided with ongoing support and opportunities from the company to share their insights.

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Next Steps

With the appropriate amount of investment and strategic implementation, Thought Leadership can have tremendous benefits for companies regardless of their size.

My Thought Leadership Intensive program provides companies with a structured way to develop their potential Thought Leaders. It is designed to give business professionals the capability to develop their ideas as well as the confidence to move into Thought Leadership.

I have worked with individuals in organisations that want to undertake this process to help them be better leaders. This includes companies as small as eight employees, up to large corporations with over 50,000 employees.

Through Thought Leadership these participants have successfully been able to explain strategy and ideas more effectively. They have also increased sales by enhancing their profile and explaining the value they add with greater confidence and conviction.

If you think Thought Leadership can add value to you or your company contact us by calling +61 3 8383 2128 or send an email to enquiry@gabrielledolan.com. Visit www.gabrielledolan.com to download the Thought Leadership Intensive brochure.



G a b r i e l l e D o l a n



About the Author

Gabrielle Dolan can tell you a story or two.

In fact, it was while working in a senior leadership role at National Australia Bank that she realised the power of storytelling in effective business communication. Since that epiphany, Gabrielle has found her calling as a global thought leader on authentic leadership and business storytelling.

A highly sought-after keynote speaker, educator and author, Gabrielle's extensive client list includes Telstra, EY, Accenture, VISA, Australia Post, National Australia Bank, Amazon, Vodafone and the Obama Foundation.

She holds a master's degree in management and leadership from Swinburne University, an associate diploma in education and training from the University of Melbourne, and is a graduate of the Harvard Kennedy School of Executive Education.

Gabrielle is also the bestselling author of *Real Communication: How to be you and lead true*, a finalist in the Australia Business Leadership Book Awards for 2019. Her other published books include *Stories for Work* (2017), *Storytelling for Job Interviews* (2016), *Ignite* (2015) and *Hooked* (2013). Her latest title, *Magnetic Stories: Connect with customers and engage employees with brand storytelling* was published by Wiley in March 2021 and debuted at number two on Australia's best selling business books.

Bringing humanity to the way business people communicate isn't just a career, it's a calling. Her dedication to the industry was recognised when Gabrielle was awarded the 2020 Communicator of the Year by the International Association of Business Communicators Asia Pacific region. The ultimate expression of her passion for the cause is her Jargon Free Fridays global movement (jargonfreefridays.com).



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Books by Gabrielle

