

A HIGHER
STANDARD OF
LEADERSHIP



Lessons from
the Life of
Gandhi

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CONTENTS

PREFACE	ix
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INTRODUCTION: THE CHALLENGE OF A HIGHER STANDARD	1
---	---

SECTION I

A SINGLE STANDARD OF CONDUCT	11
------------------------------------	----

1 Develop a Basis for the Single Standard: Commit to Absolute Values	19
---	----

2 Acknowledge the Ideal: Commit to the Journey	27
---	----

3 Develop the Guide That Will Keep You on the Journey: Commit to Training Your Conscience	33
--	----

4 Reduce Forces That Lead You Astray: Commit to Reducing Attachments	37
---	----

5 Be Willing to Stand Scrutiny: Commit to Minimizing Secrecy	43
---	----

6 The Essential Quality: Courage	49
--	----

SECTION II

THE SPIRIT OF SERVICE	57
-----------------------------	----

7 Focus on Responsibilities	63
-----------------------------------	----

8 Emphasize Values-Based Service	71
--	----

9 Make a Commitment to Personal Service	77
---	----

10 Understand the Needs of the People You Wish to Serve	83
--	----

11 Reconcile Power With Service	89
---------------------------------------	----

SECTION III

DECISIONS AND ACTIONS BOUNDED BY

MORAL PRINCIPLES 95

12 Establish Principles of Governance 101

13 Create Integrity in the Decision Process 109

14 Change the Criteria for Decision Making 117

15 Implement Decisions Within Moral Constraints 129

CONCLUSION: TAKING UP THE CHALLENGE 139

A BRIEF HISTORY OF GANDHI 141

SUGGESTED READINGS 145

NOTES 149

INDEX 153

INTRODUCTION: THE CHALLENGE OF A HIGHER STANDARD

Today, many people believe that it is not possible to be successful in the world of business and politics and still to maintain one's integrity—integrity not defined by absence of financial corruption, but by adherence to moral principles in all activities. Many have also come to believe that a major purpose of leadership is to acquire power and privilege. And many believe that practical political and business decisions would be less effective if serious consideration were given to moral issues.

The standard of leadership depends not only on the qualities and beliefs of our leaders but also on the expectations we have of them. As long we believe that our leaders lack integrity, our expectations are likely to

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be mirrored in their conduct. Therefore, it is up to each of us to improve our own standard of leadership and thus raise our expectations of those who would lead us.

In putting forward a path to a higher standard of leadership, there is no greater exemplar than Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Gandhi spent more than fifty years in public life and is best known for leading hundreds of millions of people against one of the greatest empires in the history of the world. In contrast to the other political leaders and military commanders of his time—men such as Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, Churchill, Roosevelt, de Gaulle, Eisenhower, Montgomery, Patton, and MacArthur—Gandhi wore no resplendent uniform, commanded no armies, and held no government position. Instead he preached and—more importantly—lived the gospel of truth and nonviolence and demonstrated through his life of service the oneness of all humanity. He reminded the world that the human spirit is indomitable and that courage and love are more powerful than force. The world acknowledged his special place when the United Nations flew its flag at half-mast when he was assassinated. He is the only individual with no connection to any government or international organization for whom this has been done.

Gandhi had many of the qualities we associate with

successful leaders. In addition to courage and determination, he could sustain a high energy level for extended periods, he was decisive, he had great interpersonal skills, he was thoughtful but action oriented, and he paid great attention to the details of implementation.

Gandhi's life was not governed by policies; it was governed by principles and values. The best political leaders have their country as the source of their passion. Business leaders have as their passion the organization, whether it is through customers, products, or technology. Gandhi's life was driven by his religion: truth and non-violence and a life of service to others. When a journalist asked Gandhi for a message for the United States, especially for African Americans, Gandhi responded, "My life is its own message."²

Those who have seen the film *Gandhi* know of his work in the political arena—the struggle for freedom from discrimination for Indians in South Africa and, later, the movement for independence from British rule in India. But the full scope of Gandhi's activities goes beyond what any leader in public life has ever attempted. (A list of suggested readings is given in the back of this book for those who wish to develop a greater understanding of the range of his thoughts and actions.)

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