

INTRODUCTION BY JAMES M. KOUZES

# S LEADERSHIP

A JOSSEY-BASS READER

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TICHY • KOTTER • GOLEMAN • HESSELBEIN  
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IB

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# Business Leadership

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# Introduction

James M. Kouzes

Recently, a senior executive was relating to me that in his forty-year career, he'd been part of more than fifteen different strategic initiatives—from zero defects to management by objectives to total quality management to lean thinking to reengineering. “You name it,” he said, “and we’ve done it.” The trends have come and gone, but “I’ve observed one constant theme across all of them,” he continued. “The theme is that leaders have to step forward and get involved with change. Although each idea on how to ‘do change’ is somewhat different—and they all have some good parts—without leadership, nothing works.”

That could well be the theme of this volume. It’s a strong statement, to be sure, but try naming one significant movement inside or outside the boundaries of business that wandered leaderless into the history books. Leadership was around long before any of the all-star team of scholars and executives in this book penned their first word, and it will be around long after they’ve put their final period to their final sentence. Leadership is not a fad. It’s a fact. It’s not here today, gone tomorrow. It’s here today, here forever.

Leadership matters. And it matters more in times of uncertainty than in times of stability. We certainly have our share of uncertainty right now. We've been shaken by the horrifying acts of terrorists, disgusted by the unspeakable acts of holy men, and flimflammed by greedy scoundrels at the highest levels of business. It might seem that these egregious offenses call into question just about everything we've been telling leaders for all these years. It might seem that we should be more suspicious of the advice of any leadership scholar. Maybe. But I would submit that when you carefully read all the essays in this volume, you will come to appreciate how much business and society have strayed from the path advocated by the women and men who've spent their careers as students of the subject. More than ever, there is a need to return to the basics and to take to heart the fundamentals of leadership.

This is not to say that everyone agrees on every single trait, talent, skill, or style that characterizes leadership. There are some significant differences in the points of view contained within these pages. Thank God for the distinctive contributions. But if there weren't some continuity of content, we ought to wonder whether or not we're all observing the same phenomena.

Each piece in this ensemble work speaks for itself. Each stands on its own merits. But I've noticed some themes that weave this text together into something more than a "greatest hits" collection.

## LEADERSHIP IS A SET OF SKILLS AND ABILITIES

I'd wager my 401(k) that every one of the authors and experts who have contributed to *Business Leadership* have been asked

more than once, “Are leaders born or made?” I guarantee you that I get asked that question *every* time I give a speech. What’s the answer?

Sure, all leaders *are* born. I’ve never met one who wasn’t. So are all athletes, scholars, artists, accountants, salespeople, and trainers; you name it. We’re *all* born. So what? It’s what you do with what you have before you die that’s important.

Leadership is not contained in a gene any more or any less than other pursuits. Leadership is not a place, it’s not a position, and it’s not a secret code that can’t be deciphered by ordinary people. Leadership is an *observable set of skills and abilities*.

*Of course* some people are better at it than others. Again, so what? The more we attribute leadership to a set of innate character traits, the more we abdicate our own responsibility to become the best we can be. The more we wait for genetic scientists to help us select the best and the brightest, the more we avoid personal accountability for the work we now do.

It’s pure myth that only a lucky few can decipher the code and that the rest of us can’t. And believing in this myth creates a self-fulfilling prophecy that dooms society to having only a few good leaders. Only by assuming that leadership is a learnable set of practices can we ever discover how many good leaders there really are.

When you read Tichy, Goleman, Kotter, Hesselbein, De Pree, Kouzes and Posner, Bolman and Deal, Hersey and Blanchard, Greenleaf, and Bennis, you’ll notice that not one of them reports, “Eureka, I found the gene for leadership!” They all talk about how leaders must be, what leaders do, and the impact leaders’ actions have on others.

Not everyone in this volume shares the exact same point of view, but even Buckingham and Clifton—who reside more at

the “leadership as talent” end of the spectrum—go to great lengths to identify the behaviors associated with it. There may not be agreement that *everyone* can become a leader, but there is agreement that leadership is a set of skills and abilities that people can master.

## THE INSTRUMENT OF LEADERSHIP IS THE SELF

Humans are toolmakers. We are developers of technology and techniques that enable us to do our work more productively and live our lives more happily. Engineers, for example, have their software and computers. Golfers have their clubs and balls. Painters have their brushes and canvases. What, then, are a leader’s instruments?

The leader’s primary instrument is the self. That’s really all we have to work with. It’s not going to be the code written by some brilliant programmer, the smart chip inside the personal digital assistant, or the phrase-turning script of a clever speech-writer that will make us better leaders. It’s what we do with ourselves that’s going to make the difference. The extent to which leaders become masters of their craft is the extent to which they learn to play themselves. Leadership development is self-development.

The quest for becoming a better leader is first an inner quest to discover who you are. This is especially inherent in the pieces by Quinn and by Charan, Drotter, and Noel. McCall reminds us that leaders can get derailed unless they know their weaknesses as well as their strengths, and Buckingham and Clifton tell us to pay particular attention to those strengths. Van Velsor and Guthrie remind us that learning to lead is a lifelong process, not some quickie course you take on a weekend or on

the Web. If you're going to prepare yourself to lead, prepare to go on a deep dive.

You cannot separate leadership from the person leading, and the person leading cannot separate himself or herself from those they lead. When leaders become celebrities and cover models—too full of themselves to worry about the welfare of others and too hip to believe that the rules we live by also apply to them—we're all in a heap of trouble.

## CREDIBILITY IS THE FOUNDATION OF LEADERSHIP

Leadership is a relationship between those who aspire to lead and those who chose to follow. Sometimes the relationship is one-to-one; sometimes it's one-to-many. But regardless of whether the followers number one or one thousand, leadership is a relationship.

Barry Posner and I have been conducting research on this relationship for more than two decades. What is most striking and most evident from our research is that over time and across continents, the single most important quality people admire is *personal credibility*. *Credibility is the foundation of leadership*.

We want to believe in our leaders. We want to have faith and confidence in them as people. We want to believe that their word can be trusted, that they are personally excited and enthusiastic about the direction in which we are headed, and that they have the knowledge and skill to lead. If people don't believe in the messenger, they won't believe the message. Values and beliefs are at the core of personal credibility. To be credible, leaders must know who they are and what they stand for.

Our colleagues Ciulla, O'Toole, Badaracco, and Bolman and Deal share our view that ethics, morality, honesty, character, and

personal discipline matter. Somewhere along the way during the irrationally exuberant, soaring-stock-market days of the 1990s, these notions came to be viewed—by some observers, at least—as quaint and unfit for the “brand me” school of leadership. No longer. Once we learned that the books had been cooked and we watched the air get sucked out of our retirement accounts, we emerged from a fantasy world to realize just how much character and courage count.

Many people around the globe, though, have been made more cynical by all the illegalities and immoralities. Many are fed up, angry, disgusted, and pessimistic about their future. Trust is so low among some groups that they’d rather keep their money under a mattress than invest it in equities. One of the most critical lessons from all this is that our entire capitalist system is really based on faith. If people don’t believe in those who handle their money, their livelihoods, and their lives, they’ll just refuse to participate.

We can all expect many more massive and wrenching changes in the years to come. The efficacy of any change initiative is inextricably linked to the credibility of the individuals leading the efforts. Constituents will become willingly involved to the extent that they believe in the people sponsoring the change. It is wise, therefore, for leaders to begin every significant change with a “credit check.” It’s not just “Do they believe that the new CRM system will improve our performance?” It’s also “Do they believe in me and my ability to lead this change effort?”

## LEADERS FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

Being forward-looking is what differentiates leaders from other credible people. While credibility is the foundation, the capac-

ity to paint an uplifting and ennobling picture of the future is that special something that truly sets leaders apart. Leaders must be able to gaze across the horizon of time and imagine that greater things are ahead. They must foresee something out there, vague as it might appear from the distance, that others do not. They must imagine that extraordinary feats are possible or that the ordinary can be transformed into something noble.

The consensus among Nanus, Drucker, Collins and Porras, and Hamel is that little can happen without vision. All enterprises or projects, big and small, begin in the mind's eye. They begin with imagination and with the belief that what is merely an image can one day be made real. Without a clear view of the potential future, constituents will be as nervous as tourists driving an unfamiliar mountain road in the fog.

While the evidence is abundantly clear that constituents need and expect leaders to have a clear vision for the future, there's been a disturbing trend among some executives in the most senior ranks of large institutions. More than one could be heard uttering a phrase like "Visibility is limited" and then following it by some excuse for why they can't articulate where their organizations are headed. Well, excuse me. If you're not sure where you're headed, O Captain of the Ship, then let me the hell off. Granted, times are uncertain. Granted, you can't predict your company's stock price tomorrow. But there's absolutely no excuse for abdicating your responsibility for clearly and passionately articulating your collective destination.

Leaders must also engage their constituents in a dialogue about the future. When we can clearly see how we fit into the image of the future, we're more inclined to want to go there. It's like trying to put together a jigsaw puzzle. It's a lot easier when we can see the picture on the top of the box. Leaders must be able to paint that picture.

## THE LEGACY YOU LEAVE IS THE LIFE YOU LEAD

Much as compelling words are essential to uplifting spirits, exemplary leaders know that constituents are moved by deeds. They expect leaders to show up, to pay attention, and to participate directly in the process of getting extraordinary things done. Leaders take every opportunity to show others by their own example that they are deeply committed to the aspirations they espouse. Leading by example is how leaders make visions and values tangible. It is how they provide the evidence that they are personally committed.

Bossidy and Charan remind us that you have to execute. When it comes to deciding whether a leader is believable, people first listen to the words and then watch the actions. A judgment of “credible” is handed down when the two are consonant. How you lead your life is how people judge whether they want to put their lives in your hands.

Leaders are judged by how they spend their time, how they react to critical incidents, the stories they tell, the questions they ask, the language and symbols they choose, and the measures they use. Nothing fuels the fires of cynicism more than hypocrisy, and leaders need to be constantly vigilant about aligning what they practice with what they preach. If you dream of leaving a legacy, then you’d better heed the Golden Rule of Leadership: DWYSYWD—*do what you say you will do*.

Schein and Spreitzer and Quinn remind us, also, that leadership is not a solo act. It takes collaboration to get anything significant done in organizations. There is not a single example of extraordinary achievement that occurred without the active involvement and support of many people. Long before “empowerment” came into the popular vocabulary,

credible leaders knew that only when their constituents felt strong, capable, and efficacious could they ever hope to get extraordinary things done. Constituents who feel weak, incompetent, and insignificant consistently underperform, want to flee the organization, and are ripe for disenchantment, even revolution.

## CHANGE IS THE WORK OF LEADERS

Ask people to make a list of exemplary leaders, people they consider leadership role models. Having done this exercise many times, I can tell you that people will recall individuals who served during times of turbulence, conflict, innovation, and change. They think of people who triumphed against overwhelming odds, who took initiative when there was inertia, who confronted the established order, who rose to the challenge of adversity, who mobilized people and institutions in the face of strong resistance. They think of people who generated momentum in society and then guided that energy toward a more fulfilling future.

This does not have to be a list of famous leaders. It can be a highly personal one. It doesn't matter. The results are the same. The study of leadership is the study of how men and women guide us through adversity, uncertainty, hardship, disruption, transformation, transition, recovery, new beginnings, and other significant challenges. It's also the study of how men and women, in times of constancy and complacency, actively seek to disturb the status quo and awaken to new possibilities.

Personal, business, and social hardships have a way of making us come face to face with who we really are and what we're capable of becoming. Only challenge produces the opportunity