CHAPTER ONE

What Is Leadership?

Max DePree

The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between the two, the leader must become a servant and a debtor. That sums up the progress of an artful leader.

Concepts of leadership, ideas about leadership, and leadership practices are the subject of much thought, discussion, writing, teaching, and learning. True leaders are sought after and cultivated. Leadership is not an easy subject to explain. A friend of mine characterizes leaders simply like this: “Leaders don’t inflict pain; they bear pain.”

The goal of thinking hard about leadership is not to produce great, or charismatic, or well-known leaders. The measure of leadership is not the quality of the head, but the tone of the body. The signs of outstanding leadership appear primarily among the followers. Are the followers reaching their potential? Are they learning? Serving? Do

This chapter was originally published as “What Is Leadership?” in Max DePree’s Leadership Is an Art. (New York: Doubleday, 1989).
they achieve the required results? Do they change with grace? Manage conflict?

I would like to ask you to think about the concept of leadership in a certain way. Try to think about a leader, in the words of the gospel writer Luke, as “one who serves.” Leadership is a concept of owing certain things to the institution. It is a way of thinking about institutional heirs, a way of thinking about stewardship as contrasted with ownership.

The art of leadership requires us to think about the leader-as-steward in terms of relationships: of assets and legacy, of momentum and effectiveness, of civility and values.

Leaders should leave behind them assets and a legacy. First, consider assets; certainly leaders owe assets. Leaders owe their institutions vital financial health, and the relationships and reputation that enable continuity of that financial health. Leaders must deliver to their organizations the appropriate services, products, tools, and equipment that people in the organization need in order to be accountable. In many institutions leaders are responsible for providing land and facilities.

But what else do leaders owe? What are artful leaders responsible for? Surely we need to include people. People are the heart and spirit of all that counts. Without people, there is no need for leaders. Leaders can decide to be primarily concerned with leaving assets to their institutional heirs or they can go beyond that and capitalize on the opportunity to leave a legacy, a legacy that takes into account the more difficult, qualitative side of life, one which provides greater meaning, more challenge, and more joy in the lives of those whom leaders enable.

Besides owing assets to their institutions, leaders owe the people in those institutions certain things. Leaders need to be concerned with the institutional value system which, after all, leads to the principles and standards that guide the practices of the people in the institution. Leaders owe a clear statement of the values of the organization. These values should be broadly understood and agreed to and should shape our corporate and individual behavior. What is this value system based on? How is it expressed? How is it audited? These are not easy questions to deal with.

Leaders are also responsible for future leadership. They need to identify, develop, and nurture future leaders.
What Is Leadership?

Leaders are responsible for such things as a sense of quality in the institution, for whether or not the institution is open to influence and open to change. Effective leaders encourage contrary opinions, an important source of vitality. I am talking about how leaders can nurture the roots of an institution, about a sense of continuity, about institutional culture.

Leaders owe a covenant to the corporation or institution, which is, after all, a group of people. Leaders owe the organization a new reference point for what caring, purposeful, committed people can be in the institutional setting. Notice I did not say what people can do—what we can do is merely a consequence of what we can be. Corporations, like the people who compose them, are always in a state of becoming. Covenants bind people together and enable them to meet their corporate needs by meeting the needs of one another. We must do this in a way that is consonant with the world around us.

Leaders owe a certain maturity. Maturity as expressed in a sense of self-worth, a sense of belonging, a sense of expectancy, a sense of responsibility, a sense of accountability, and a sense of equality.

Leaders owe the corporation rationality. Rationality gives reason and mutual understanding to programs and to relationships. It gives visible order. Excellence and commitment and competence are available to us only under the rubric of rationality. A rational environment values trust and human dignity and provides the opportunity for personal development and self-fulfillment in the attainment of the organization’s goals.

Business literacy, understanding the economic basic of a corporation, is essential. Only a group of people who share a body of knowledge and continually learn together can stay vital and viable.

Leaders owe people space, space in the sense of freedom. Freedom in the sense of enabling our gifts to be exercised. We need to give each other the space to grow, to be ourselves, to exercise our diversity. We need to give each other space so that we may both give and receive such beautiful things as ideas, openness, dignity, joy, healing, and inclusion. And in giving each other the gift of space, we need also to offer the gifts of grace and beauty to which each of us is entitled.

Another way to think about what leaders owe is to ask this question: What is it without which this institution would not be what it is?
Leaders are obligated to provide and maintain momentum. Leadership comes with a lot of debts to the future. There are more immediate obligations as well. Momentum is one. Momentum in a vital company is palpable. It is not abstract or mysterious. It is the feeling among a group of people that their lives and work are intertwined and moving toward a recognizable and legitimate goal. It begins with competent leadership and a management team strongly dedicated to aggressive managerial development and opportunities. This team’s job is to provide an environment that allows momentum to gather.

Momentum comes from a clear vision of what the corporation ought to be, from a well-thought-out strategy to achieve that vision, and from carefully conceived and communicated directions and plans that enable everyone to participate and be publicly accountable in achieving those plans.

Momentum depends on a pertinent but flexible research and development program led by people with outstanding gifts and unique talents. Momentum results when a corporation has an aggressive, professional, inspired group of people in its marketing and sales units. Momentum results when the operations group serves its customers in such a way that the customer sees them as their best supplier of tools, equipment, and services. Underlying these complex activities is the essential role of the financial team. They provide the financial guidelines and the necessary ratios. They are responsible for equity among the various groups who compose the corporate family.

Leaders are responsible for effectiveness. Much has been written about effectiveness—some of the best of it by Peter Drucker. He has such a great ability to simplify concepts. One of the things he tells us is that efficiency is doing the thing right, but effectiveness is doing the right thing.

Leaders can delegate efficiency, but they must deal personally with effectiveness. Of course, the natural question is “how?” We could fill many pages dealing with how to be effective, but I would like to touch on just two ways.

The first is the understanding that effectiveness comes about through enabling others to reach their potential—both their personal potential and their corporate or institutional potential.

In some South Pacific cultures, a speaker holds a conch shell as a symbol of a temporary position of authority. Leaders must understand who holds the conch—that is, who should be listened to
and when. This makes it possible for people to use their gifts to the fullest for the benefit of everyone.

Sometimes, to be sure, a leader must choose who is to speak. That is part of the risk of leadership. A leader must assess capability. A leader must be a judge of people. For leaders choose a person, not a position.

Another way to improve effectiveness is to encourage roving leadership. Roving leadership arises and expresses itself at varying times and in varying situations, according to the dictates of those situations. Roving leaders have the special gifts, or the special strengths, or the special temperament to lead in these special situations. They are acknowledged by others who are ready to follow them.

Leaders must take a role in developing, expressing, and defending civility and values. In a civilized institution or corporation, we see good manners, respect for persons, an understanding of “good goods,” and an appreciation of the way in which we serve each other.

Civility has to do with identifying values as opposed to following fashions. Civility might be defined as an ability to distinguish between what is actually healthy and what merely appears to be living. A leader can tell the difference between living edges and dying ones.

Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes is reported to have said this about simplicity: “I would not give a fig for the simplicity this side of complexity, but I would give my life for the simplicity on the other side of complexity.” To be at the living edge is to search out the “simplicity on the other side of complexity.”

In a day when so much energy seems to be spent on maintenance and manuals, on bureaucracy and meaningless quantification, to be a
leader is to enjoy the special privileges of complexity, of ambiguity, of diversity. But to be a leader means, especially, having the opportunity to make a meaningful difference in the lives of those who permit leaders to lead.

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Examination of the tasks performed by leaders takes us to the heart of some of the most interesting questions concerning leadership. It also helps to distinguish among the many kinds of leaders. Leaders differ strikingly in how well they perform various functions.

The following nine tasks seem to me to be the most significant functions of leadership, but I encourage readers to add to the list or to describe the tasks in other ways. Leadership activities implicit in all of the tasks (for example, communicating, relating effectively with people) are not dealt with separately.

**ENVISIONING GOALS**

The two tasks at the heart of the popular notion of leadership are goal setting and motivating. As a high school senior put it, “Leaders point us in the right direction and tell us to get moving.” Although we take
a more complicated view of the tasks of leadership, it is appropriate that we begin with the envisioning of goals. Albert Einstein said, “Perfection of means and confusion of ends seems to characterize our age.”

Leaders perform the function of goal setting in diverse ways. Some assert a vision of what the group (organization, community, nation) can be at its best. Others point us toward solutions to our problems. Still others, presiding over internally divided groups, are able to define overarching goals that unify constituencies and focus energies. In today’s complex world, the setting of goals may have to be preceded by extensive research and problem solving.

Obviously, a constituency is not a blank slate for the leader to write on. Any collection of people sufficiently related to be called a community has many shared goals, some explicit, some unexpressed (perhaps even unconscious), as tangible as better prices for their crops, as intangible as a better future for their children. In a democracy, the leader takes such shared goals into account.

The relative roles of leaders and followers in determining goals vary from group to group. The teacher of first-grade children and the sergeant training recruits do not do extensive consulting as to goals; congressional candidates do a great deal. In the case of many leaders, goals are handed to them by higher authority. The factory manager and the combat commander may be superb leaders, but many of their goals are set at higher levels.

In short, goals emerge from many sources. The culture itself specifies certain goals; constituents have their concerns; higher authority makes its wishes known. Out of the welter, leaders take some goals as given, and making their own contribution, select and formulate a set of objectives. It may sound as though leaders have only marginal freedom, but in fact there is usually considerable opportunity, even for lower-level leaders, to put their personal emphasis and interpretation on the setting of goals.

There is inevitable tension between long- and short-term goals. On the one hand, constituents are not entirely comfortable with the jerkiness of short-term goal seeking, and they value the sense of stability that comes with a vision of far horizons. On the other hand, long-term goals may require them to defer immediate gratification on at least some fronts. Leaders often fear that when citizens enter the voting booth, they will remember the deferral of gratification more vividly than they remember the reason for it.
Before the Civil War, Elizabeth Cady Stanton saw virtually the whole agenda for women’s rights as it was to emerge over the succeeding century. Many of her contemporaries in the movement were not at all prepared for such an inclusive vision and urged her to play it down.

Another visionary far ahead of his time was the South American liberator, Simone Bolivar. He launched his fight in that part of Gran Colombia, which is now Venezuela, but in his mind was a vision not only of independence for all of Spain’s possessions in the New World, but also a peaceful alliance of the new states in some form of league or confederation. Although he was tragically ahead of his time, the dream never died and has influenced generations of Latin American leaders striving toward unity.

AFFIRMING VALUES

A great civilization is a drama lived in the minds of a people. It is a shared vision; it is shared norms, expectations, and purposes. When one thinks of the world’s great civilizations, the most vivid images that crowd in on us are apt to be of the physical monuments left behind—the Pyramids, the Parthenon, the Mayan temples. But in truth, all the physical splendor was the merest by-product. The civilizations themselves, from beginning to end, existing in the minds of men and women.

If we look at ordinary human communities, we see the same reality: A community lives in the minds of its members—in shared assumptions, beliefs, customs, ideas that give meaning, ideas that motivate. And among the ideas are norms or values. In any healthy, reasonably coherent community, people come to have shared views concerning right and wrong, better and worse—in personal conduct, in governing, in art, whatever. They define for their time and place what things are legal or illegal, virtuous or vicious, good taste or bad. They have little or no impulse to be neutral about such matters. Every society is, as Philip Rieff (1966) puts it, “a system of moralizing demands.”

Values are embodied in the society’s religious beliefs and its secular philosophy. Over the past century, many intellectuals have looked down on the celebration of our values as an unsophisticated and often hypocritical activity. But every healthy society celebrates its values. They are expressed in art, in song, in ritual. They are stated explicitly
in historical documents, in ceremonial speeches, in textbooks. They are reflected in stories told around the campfire, in the legends kept alive by old folks, in the fables told to children.

In a pluralistic community there are, within the broad consensus that enables the community to function, many and vigorous conflicts over specific values.

THE REGENERATION OF VALUES. One of the milder pleasures of maturity is bemoaning the decay of once strongly held values. Values always decay over time. Societies that keep their values alive do so not by escaping the processes of decay but by powerful processes of regeneration. There must be perpetual rebuilding. Each generation must rediscover the living elements in its own tradition and adapt them to present realities. To assist in that rediscovery is one of the tasks of leadership.

The leaders whom we admire the most help to revitalize our shared beliefs and values. They have always spent a portion of their time teaching the value framework.

Sometimes the leader’s affirmation of values challenges entrenched hypocrisy or conflicts with the values held by a segment of the constituency. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, speaking for now-accepted values, was regarded as a thoroughgoing radical in her day (Griffith, 1984). Jesus not only comforted the afflicted but afflicted the comfortable.

**MOTIVATING**

Chapter 16 [of *On Leadership*] is devoted to the task of motivation, so I deal with it briefly here. Leaders do not create motivation out of thin air. They unlock or channel existing motives. Any group has a great tangle of motives. Effective leaders tap those that serve the purposes of collective action in pursuit of shared goals. They accomplish the alignment of individual and group goals. They deal with the circumstances that often lead group members to withhold their best efforts. They call for the kind of effort and restraint, drive and discipline that make for great performance. They create a climate in which there is pride in making significant contributions to shared goals.

Note that in the tasks of leadership, the transactions between leaders and constituents go beyond the rational level to the non-rational and unconscious levels of human functioning. Young potential
leaders who have been schooled to believe that all elements of a problem are rational and technical, reducible to words and numbers, are ill-equipped to move into an area in which intuition and empathy are powerful aids to problem solving.

**MANAGING**

Most managers exhibit some leadership skills, and most leaders on occasion find themselves managing. Leadership and management are not the same thing, but they overlap. It makes sense to include managing in the list of tasks leaders perform.

In the paragraphs that follow I focus on those aspects of leadership that one might describe as managing without slipping into a conventional description of managing as such. And I try to find terminology and phrasing broad enough to cover the diverse contexts in which leadership occurs in corporations, unions, municipalities, political movements, and so on.

1. *Planning and Priority Setting.* Assuming that broad goals have been set, someone has to plan, fix priorities, choose means, and formulate policy. These are functions often performed by leaders. When Lyndon B. Johnson said, early in his presidency, that education was the nation’s number one priority, he galvanized the nation’s educational leaders and released constructive energies far beyond any governmental action that had yet been taken. It was a major factor in leading me to accept a post in his Cabinet.

2. *Organizing and Institution Building.* We have all seen leaders enjoy their brilliant moment and then disappear without a trace because they had no gift for building their purposes into institutions. In the ranks of leaders, Alfred Sloan was at the other extreme. Although he sold a lot of automobiles, he was not primarily a salesman; he was an institution builder. His understanding of organization was intuitive and profound.

   Someone has to design the structures and processes through which substantial endeavors are accomplished over time. Ideally, leaders should not regard themselves as indispensable but should enable the group to carry on. Institutions are a means to that end. Jean Monnet (1978) said, “Nothing is possible without individuals; nothing is lasting without institutions.”
3. **Keeping the System Functioning.** Presiding over the arrangements through which individual energies are coordinated to achieve shared goals sounds like a quintessential management task. But it is clear that most leaders find themselves occasionally performing one or another of the essential chores: mobilizing and allocating resources; staffing and ensuring the continuing vitality of the team; creating and maintaining appropriate procedures; directing, delegating, and coordinating; providing a system of incentives; reporting, evaluating, and holding accountable.

4. **Agenda Setting and Decision Making.** The goals may be clear and the organization well set up and smoothly operating, but there remain agenda-setting and decision-making functions that must be dealt with. The announcement of goals without a proposed program for meeting them is a familiar enough political phenomenon—but not one that builds credibility. There are leaders who can motivate and inspire but who cannot visualize a path to the goal in practical, feasible steps. Leaders who lack that skill must bring onto their team people who have it.

One of the purest examples of the leader as agenda setter was Florence Nightingale (Huxley, 1975). Her public image was and is that of the lady of mercy, but under her gentle manner, she was a rugged spirit, a fighter, a tough-minded system changer. She never made public appearances or speeches and, except for her two years in the Crimea, held no public position. Her strength was that she was a formidable authority on the evils to be remedied, she knew what to do about them, and she used public opinion to goad top officials to adopt her agenda.

5. **Exercising Political Judgment.** In our pluralistic society, persons directing substantial enterprises find that they are presiding over many constituencies within their organizations and contending with many outside. Each has its needs and claims. One of the tasks of the leader/manager is to make the political judgments necessary to prevent secondary conflicts of purpose from blocking progress toward primary goals. Sometimes the literature on administration and management treats politics as an alien and disruptive force. But Aaron Wildavsky (1984), in his brilliant book, *The Nursing Father: Moses as a Political Leader*, makes the point that leaders are inevitably political.
ACHIEVING WORKABLE UNITY

A pluralistic society is, by definition, one that accepts many different elements, each with its own purposes. Collisions are inevitable and often healthy—as in commercial competition, in civil suits, and in efforts to redress grievances through the political process. Conflict is necessary in the case of oppressed groups that must fight for the justice that is due them. All our elective officials know the intense conflict of the political campaign. Indeed, one could argue that willingness to engage in battle when necessary is a sine qua non of leadership.

But most leaders most of the time are striving to diminish conflict rather than increase it. Some measure of cohesion and mutual tolerance is an absolute requirement of social functioning.

Sometimes the problem is not outright conflict but an unwillingness to cooperate. One of the gravest problems George Washington faced as a general was that the former colonies, although they had no doubt they were all on the same side, were not always sure they wanted to cooperate. As late as 1818, John Randolph declared, “When I speak of my country, I mean the Commonwealth of Virginia” (Bruce, 1922).

The unifying function of leaders is well illustrated in the actions of George Bush after winning the presidential election of 1988. He promptly met with his defeated opponent, Michael Dukakis; with his chief rival for the nomination, Senator Robert Dole; and with Jesse Jackson and Coretta Scott King, both of whom had opposed his election. He asked Jack Kemp, another of his rivals for the nomination, to be Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, and Senator Dole’s wife, Elizabeth Hanford Dole, to be Secretary of Labor.

Leaders in this country today must cope with the fragmentation of the society into groups that have great difficulty in understanding one another or agreeing on common goals. It is a fragmentation rooted in the pluralism of our society, in the obsessive specialization of modern life, and in the skill with which groups organize to advance their concerns.

Under the circumstances, all our leaders must spend part of their time dealing with polarization and building community. There is a false notion that this is a more bland, less rigorous task than leadership of one of the combative segments. In fact, the leader willing to combat polarization is the braver person, and is generally under fire from both sides. I would suggest that Jean Monnet, the father of the European Common Market, is a useful model for future leaders.
When there were conflicting purposes, Monnet saw the possibility of shared goals, and he knew how to move his contemporaries toward those shared goals.

**TRUST.** Much depends on the general level of trust in the organization or society. The infinitely varied and complex doings of the society—any society—would come to a halt if people did not trust other people most of the time—trust them to observe custom, follow the rules, and behave with some predictability. Countless circumstances operate to diminish that trust, but one may be sure that, if the society is functioning at all, some degree of trust survives.

Leaders can do much to preserve the necessary level of trust. And the first requirement is that they have the capacity to inspire trust in themselves. In sixteenth-century Italy, where relations among the warring kingdoms were an unending alley fight, Machiavelli’s chilling advice to the Prince—“It is necessary . . . to be a feigner and a dissembler,” or, as another translator renders the same passage, “You must be a great liar and hypocrite”—may have been warranted (Machiavelli, 1952). And, under conditions of iron rule, Hitler and Stalin were able to live by betrayals. But in our society, leaders must work to raise the level of trust.

**EXPLAINING**

Explaining sounds too pedestrian to be on a list of leadership tasks, but every leader recognizes it. People want to know what the problem is, why they are being asked to do certain things, why they face so many frustrations. Thurman Arnold (1937) said, “Unhappy is a people that has run out of words to describe what is happening to them.” Leaders find the words.

To be heard above the hubbub in the public forum today, explaining generally requires more than clarity and eloquence. It requires effective access to the media of communication or to those segments of the population that keep ideas in circulation—editors, writers, intellectuals, association leaders, advocacy groups, chief executive officers, and the like.

The task of explaining is so important that some who do it exceptionally well play a leadership role even though they are not leaders in the conventional sense. When the American colonies were struggling for independence, Thomas Paine was a memorable explainer. In the
powerful environmentalist surge of the 1960s and 1970s, no activist leader had as pervasive an influence on the movement as did Rachel Carson (1963), whose book *Silent Spring* burst on the scene in 1963. Betty Friedan’s (1963) *The Feminine Mystique* played a similar role for the women’s movement.

Leaders teach. Lincoln, in his second inaugural address, provided an extraordinary example of the leader as teacher. Teaching and leading are distinguishable occupations, but every great leader is clearly teaching—and every great teacher is leading.

## SERVING AS A SYMBOL

Leaders are inevitably symbols. Workers singled out to be supervisors discover that they are set apart from their old comrades in subtle ways. They try to keep the old camaraderie but things have changed. They are now symbols of management. Sergeants symbolize the chain of command. Parish religious leaders symbolize their churches.

In a group threatened with internal strife, the leader may be a crucial symbol of unity. In a minority group’s struggle to find its place, combative leaders—troublesome to others—may be to their own people the perfect symbol of their anger and their struggle.

The top leader of a community or nation symbolizes the group’s collective identity and continuity. For this reason, the death of a president produces a special reaction of grief and loss. Americans who were beyond childhood when John F. Kennedy was assassinated remember, despite the passage of decades, precisely where they were and what they were doing when the news reached them. Even for many who did not admire him, the news had the impact of a blow to the solar plexus. And those old enough to remember Franklin D. Roosevelt’s death recognize the reaction.

For late eighteenth-century Americans, George Washington was the symbol of all that they had been through together. Thomas Jefferson became such a powerful symbol of our democratic aspirations that for generations politicians fought over his memory. Those who favored Hamiltonian views sought bitterly and unsuccessfully to shatter the Jefferson image. As Merrill Peterson (1960) has cogently argued, the man himself lost reality and the symbol took over. In the dark days of the Great Depression, the American impulse to face events in a positive spirit found its symbol in the ebullient Franklin D. Roosevelt.
Outside the political area, Albert Schweitzer, the gifted theologian and musician who in 1913 gave up a comfortable and respected life in his native Germany to spend the remainder of his years presiding over a medical mission in Equatorial Africa, stands as the pristine example of leader as symbol.

Some individuals newly risen to leadership have a hard time adjusting to the reality that they are symbols. I recall a visit with a young college president who had just come into the job fresh from a professorship, with no prior administrative experience. He confided that he was deeply irked by an incident the preceding day. In his first speech before faculty, students, trustees, and alumni he had simply been himself—a man of independent mind full of lively personal opinions—and many of his listeners were nonplussed and irritated. They were not interested in a display of idiosyncratic views. They had expected him to speak as their new leader, their symbol of institutional continuity, their ceremonial collective voice. I told him gently that they had expected him to be their spokesman and symbol, and this simply angered him further. “I’ll resign,” he said, “if I can’t be myself!” Over time, he learned that leaders can rarely afford the luxury of speaking for themselves alone.

Most leaders become quite aware of the symbolic aspects of their roles and make effective use of them. One of the twentieth-century leaders who did so most skillfully was Gandhi (Erikson, 1969). In the issues he chose to do battle on, in the way he conducted his campaigns, in the jail terms and the fasting, in his manner of dress, he symbolized his people, their desperate need, and their struggle against oppression.

Needless to say, leaders do not always function as benign symbols. In the Iran-Contra affair of 1986–1987 it became apparent that men bound by their oath of office were lying to the public, lying to the Congress of the United States, and lying to one another. To some Americans they became symbols of all the falsehoods and betrayals committed by a distant and distrusted government.

REPRESENTING THE GROUP

In quieter times (we love to imagine that there were quieter times), leaders could perhaps concentrate on their own followers. Today, representing the group in its dealings with others is a substantial leadership task.
It is a truism that all of the human systems (organizations, groups, communities) that make up the society and the world are increasingly interdependent. Virtually all leaders at every level must carry on dealings with systems external to the one in which they themselves are involved—tasks of representing and negotiating, of defending institutional integrity, of public relations. As one moves higher in the ranks of leadership, such chores increase.

It goes without saying that people who have spent their careers in the world of the specialist or within the boundaries of a narrow community (their firm, their profession) are often ill-equipped for such leadership tasks. The young potential leader must learn early to cross boundaries and to know many worlds. The attributes that enable leaders to teach and lead their own constituencies may be wholly ineffective in external dealings. Military leaders who are revered by their troops may be clumsy with civilians. The business leader who is effective within the business culture may be lost in dealing with politicians. A distinctive characteristic of the ablest leaders is that they do not shrink from external representation. They see the long-term needs and goals of their constituency in the broadest context, and they act accordingly. The most capable mayors think not just of the city but of the metropolitan area and the region. Able business leaders are alert to the political climate and to world economic trends.

The most remarkable modern example of a leader carrying out the representative function is Charles De Gaulle. De Gaulle has his detractors, but none can fail to marvel at his performance in successfully representing the once and future France-as-a-great-power at a time when the nation itself was a defeated, demoralized, enemy-occupied land. By his own commanding presence, he kept France’s place at the table through the dark days. Years later Jean Monnet wrote:

“It took great strength of character for him, a traditional soldier, to cross the great dividing line of disobedience to orders from above. He was the only man of his rank with the courage to do so; and in the painful isolation felt by those Frenchmen who had decided to continue the Allied struggle, De Gaulle’s rare example was a source of great moral strength.”

RENEWING

Chapter 12 [in On Leadership] concerns the task of renewing, so I deal with it very briefly here.
Leaders need not be renewers. They can lead people down old paths, using old slogans, toward old objectives. Sometimes that is appropriate. But the world changes with disconcerting swiftness. Too often the old paths are blocked and the old solutions no longer solve anything. De Gaulle (1964), writing of France’s appalling unpreparedness for World War II, said:

“The Army became stuck in a set of ideas which had had their heyday before the end of the First World War. It was all the more inclined that way because its leaders were growing old at their posts, wedded to errors that had once constituted their glory.”

Leaders must foster the process of renewal.

So much for the tasks of leadership. The individual with a gift for building a leadership team may successfully delegate one or another of those tasks to other members of the team. One function that cannot be delegated is that of serving as symbol. That the leader is a symbol is a fact, not a matter of choice. The task is to take appropriate account of that reality and to use it well in the service of the group’s goals.

Another function that cannot be delegated entirely is the envisioning of goals. Unless the leader has a sense of where the whole enterprise is going and must go, it is not possible to delegate (or carry out personally) the other functions. To have “a sense of where the whole enterprise is going and must go” is, I am inclined to say, the very core and essence of the best leadership.

In a discussion of the tasks of leadership, a colleague of mine said, “I do not see ‘enabling’ or ‘empowering’ on the list. Aren’t those the central tasks of leadership?” For those unfamiliar with contemporary discussions of leadership, I should explain that reference to enabling or empowering has become the preferred method of condensing into a single word the widely held conviction that the purpose of leaders is not to dominate nor diminish followers but to strengthen and help them to develop.

But enabling and empowering are not separable tasks. They require a variety of actions on the parts of leaders. For example:

- Sharing information and making it possible for followers to obtain appropriate kinds of education
- Sharing power by devolving initiative and responsibility
• Building the confidence of followers so that they can achieve their own goals through their own efforts
• Removing barriers to the release of individual energy and talent
• Seeking, finding, and husbanding the various kinds of resources that followers need
• Resolving the conflicts that paralyze group action
• Providing organizational arrangements appropriate to group effort

Any attempt to describe a social process as complex as leadership inevitably makes it seem more orderly than it is. Leadership is not tidy. Decisions are made and then revised or reversed. Misunderstandings are frequent, inconsistency inevitable. Achieving a goal may simply make the next goal more urgent; inside every solution are the seeds of new problems. And as Donald Michael (1983) has pointed out, most of the time most things are out of hand. No leader enjoys that reality, but every leader knows it.

It would be easy to imagine that the tasks described are items to be handled separately, like nine items on a shopping list, each from a separate store. But the effective leader is always doing several tasks simultaneously. The best antidote to the shopping list conception is to look at the setting in which all the tasks are mingled—the complex interplay between leaders and those “led.”

References


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At time of original publication John W. Gardner had served six presidents of the United States in various leadership capacities. In addition he has served as director of several major U.S. corporations.
CHAPTER THREE

The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership

James M. Kouzes
Barry Z. Posner

Since 1983 we’ve been conducting research on personal-best leadership experiences, and we’ve discovered that there are countless examples of how leaders, like Dick and Claire, mobilize others to get extraordinary things done in virtually every arena of organized activity. We’ve found them in profit-based firms and nonprofits, manufacturing and services, government and business, health care, education and entertainment, and work and community service. Leaders reside in every city and every country, in every position and every place. They’re employees and volunteers, young and old, women and men. Leadership knows no racial or religious bounds, no ethnic or cultural borders. We find exemplary leadership everywhere we look.\(^1\)

From our analysis of thousands of personal-best leadership experiences, we’ve discovered that ordinary people who guide others along pioneering journeys follow rather similar paths. Although each experience we examined was unique in expression, every case followed remarkably similar patterns of action. We’ve forged these common practices into a model of leadership, and we offer it here as guidance for leaders as they attempt to keep their own bearings and steer others toward peak achievements.

As we looked deeper into the dynamic process of leadership, through case analyses and survey questionnaires, we uncovered five practices common to personal-best leadership experiences. When getting extraordinary things done in organizations, leaders engage in these Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership:

- Model the Way
- Inspire a Shared Vision
- Challenge the Process
- Enable Others to Act
- Encourage the Heart

The Five Practices—which we discuss briefly in this chapter—aren’t the private property of the people we studied or of a few select shining stars. Leadership is not about personality; it’s about behavior. The Five Practices are available to anyone who accepts the leadership challenge. And they’re also not the accident of a unique moment in history. The Five Practices have stood the test of time, and our most recent research confirms that they’re just as relevant today as they were when we first began our investigation more than twenty-five years ago.

**MODEL THE WAY**

Titles are granted, but it’s your behavior that wins you respect. As Tom Brack, with Europe’s SmartTeam AG, told us, “Leading means you have to be a good example, and live what you say.” This sentiment was shared across all the cases that we collected. Exemplary leaders know that if they want to gain commitment and achieve the highest standards, they must be models of the behavior they expect of others. *Leaders model the way.*
To effectively model the behavior they expect of others, leaders must first be clear about guiding principles. They must clarify values. As Lindsay Levin, chairman for Whites Group in England, explained, “You have to open up your heart and let people know what you really think and believe. This means talking about your values.” Leaders must find their own voices, and then they must clearly and distinctly give voice to their values. As the personal-best stories illustrate, leaders are supposed to stand up for their beliefs, so they’d better have some beliefs to stand up for. But it’s not just the leader’s values that are important. Leaders aren’t just representing themselves. They speak and act on behalf of a larger organization. Leaders must forge agreement around common principles and common ideals.

Eloquent speeches about common values, however, aren’t nearly enough. Leaders’ deeds are far more important than their words when one wants to determine how serious leaders really are about what they say. Words and deeds must be consistent. Exemplary leaders go first. They go first by setting the example through daily actions that demonstrate they are deeply committed to their beliefs. As Prabha Seshan, principal engineer for SSA Global, told us, “One of the best ways to prove something is important is by doing it yourself and setting an example.” She discovered that her actions spoke volumes about how the team needed to “take ownership of things they believed in and valued.” There wasn’t anything Prabha asked others to do that she wasn’t willing to do herself, and as a result, “While I always trusted my team, my team in turn trusted me.” For instance, she wasn’t required to design or code features, but by doing some of this work she demonstrated to others not only what she stood for but also how much she valued the work they were doing and what their end-user expected from the product.

The personal-best projects we heard about in our research were all distinguished by relentless effort, steadfastness, competence, and attention to detail. We were also struck by how the actions leaders took to set an example were often simple things. Sure, leaders had operational and strategic plans. But the examples they gave were not about elaborate designs. They were about the power of spending time with someone, of working side by side with colleagues, of telling stories that made values come alive, of being highly visible during times of uncertainty, and of asking questions to get people to think about values and priorities.
Modeling the way is about earning the right and the respect to lead through direct involvement and action. People follow first the person, then the plan.

**INSPIRE A SHARED VISION**

When people described to us their personal-best leadership experiences, they told of times when they imagined an exciting, highly attractive future for their organization. They had visions and dreams of what *could* be. They had absolute and total personal belief in those dreams, and they were confident in their abilities to make extraordinary things happen. Every organization, every social movement, begins with a dream. The dream or vision is the force that invents the future. *Leaders inspire a shared vision.* As Mark D’Arcangelo, system memory product marketing manager at Hitachi Semiconductor, told us about his personal-best leadership experience, “What made the difference was the vision of how things could be and clearly painting this picture for all to see and comprehend.”

Leaders gaze across the horizon of time, imagining the attractive opportunities that are in store when they and their constituents arrive at a distant destination. They envision exciting and ennobling possibilities. Leaders have a desire to make something happen, to change the way things are, to create something that no one else has ever created before. In some ways, leaders live their lives backward. They see pictures in their mind’s eye of what the results will look like even before they’ve started their project, much as an architect draws a blueprint or an engineer builds a model. Their clear image of the future pulls them forward. Yet visions seen only by leaders are insufficient to create an organized movement or a significant change in a company. A person with no constituents is not a leader, and people will not follow until they accept a vision as their own. Leaders cannot command commitment, only inspire it.

Leaders have to *enlist others in a common vision.* To enlist people in a vision, leaders must know their constituents and speak their language. People must believe that leaders understand their needs and have their interests at heart. Leadership is a dialogue, not a monologue. To enlist support, leaders must have intimate knowledge of people’s dreams, hopes, aspirations, visions, and values. Evelia Davis, merchandise manager for Mervyns, told us that, while she was good at telling people where they were going together, she also
needed to do a good job of explaining why they should follow her, how they could help reach the destination, and what this meant for them. As Evelia put it, “If you don’t believe enough to share it, talk about it, and get others excited about it then it’s not much of a vision!”

Leaders breathe life into the hopes and dreams of others and enable them to see the exciting possibilities that the future holds. Leaders forge a unity of purpose by showing constituents how the dream is for the common good. Leaders stir the fire of passion in others by expressing enthusiasm for the compelling vision of their group. Leaders communicate their passion through vivid language and an expressive style.

Whatever the venue, and without exception, the people in our study reported that they were incredibly enthusiastic about their personal-best projects. Their own enthusiasm was catching; it spread from leader to constituents. Their belief in and enthusiasm for the vision were the sparks that ignited the flame of inspiration.

**CHALLENGE THE PROCESS**

Every single personal-best leadership case we collected involved some kind of challenge. The challenge might have been an innovative new product, a cutting-edge service, a groundbreaking piece of legislation, an invigorating campaign to get adolescents to join an environmental program, a revolutionary turnaround of a bureaucratic military program, or the start-up of a new plant or business. Whatever the challenge, all the cases involved a change from the status quo. Not one person claimed to have achieved a personal best by keeping things the same. All leaders challenge the process.

Leaders venture out. None of the individuals in our study sat idly by waiting for fate to smile upon them. “Luck” or “being in the right place at the right time” may play a role in the specific opportunities leaders embrace, but those who lead others to greatness seek and accept challenge. Jennifer Cun, in her role as a budget analyst with Intel, noted how critical it is for leaders “to always be looking for ways to improve their team, taking interests outside of their job or organization, finding ways to stay current of what the competition is doing, networking, and taking initiative to try new things.”

Leaders are pioneers. They are willing to step out into the unknown. They search for opportunities to innovate, grow, and improve.
But leaders aren’t the only creators or originators of new products, services, or processes. In fact, it’s more likely that they’re not: innovation comes more from listening than from telling. Product and service innovations tend to come from customers, clients, vendors, people in the labs, and people on the front lines; process innovations, from the people doing the work. Sometimes a dramatic external event thrusts an organization into a radically new condition. Leaders have to continually be looking outside of themselves and their organizations for new and innovative products, processes, and services.

“Mediocrity and status quo will never lead a company to success in the marketplace” is what Mike Pepe, product marketing manager at O3 Entertainment, told us. “Taking risks and believing that taking them is worthwhile,” he went on to say, “are the only way companies can ‘jump’ rather than simply climb the improvement ladder.”

When it comes to innovation, the leader’s major contributions are in the creation of a climate for experimentation, the recognition of good ideas, the support of those ideas, and the willingness to challenge the system to get new products, processes, services, and systems adopted. It might be more accurate, then, to say that leaders aren’t the inventors as much as they are the early patrons and adopters of innovation.

Leaders know well that innovation and change involve experimenting and taking risks. Despite the inevitability of mistakes and failures, leaders proceed anyway. One way of dealing with the potential risks and failures of experimentation is to approach change through incremental steps and small wins.

Little victories, when piled on top of each other, build confidence that even the biggest challenges can be met. In so doing, they strengthen commitment to the long-term future. Not everyone is equally comfortable with risk and uncertainty. Leaders must pay attention to the capacity of their constituents to take control of challenging situations and to become fully committed to change. You can’t exhort people to take risks if they don’t also feel safe.

It would be ridiculous to assert that those who fail over and over again eventually succeed as leaders. Success in any endeavor isn’t a process of simply buying enough lottery tickets. The key that unlocks the door to opportunity is learning. Claude Meyer, with the Red Cross in Kenya, put it to us this way: “Leadership is learning by doing, adapting to actual conditions. Leaders are constantly learning from their errors and failures.” Life is the leader’s laboratory,
and exemplary leaders use it to conduct as many experiments as possible.

Try, fail, learn. Try, fail, learn. Try, fail, learn. That’s the leader’s mantra. Leaders are learners. They learn from their failures as well as from their successes, and they make it possible for others to do the same.

**ENABLE OTHERS TO ACT**

Grand dreams don’t become significant realities through the actions of a single person. It requires a team effort. It requires solid trust and strong relationships.

It requires deep competence and cool confidence. It requires group collaboration and individual accountability. To get extraordinary things done in organizations, leaders have to *enable others to act*.

After reviewing thousands of personal-best cases, we developed a simple test to detect whether someone is on the road to becoming a leader. That test is the frequency of the use of the word *we*. In our interviews, we found that people used *we* nearly three times more often than *I* in explaining their personal-best leadership experiences. Hewlett-Packard’s Angie Yim was the technical IT team leader on a project involving core team members from the United States, Singapore, Australia, and Hong Kong. In the past, Angie told us, she “had a bad habit of using the pronoun *I* instead of *we,*” but she learned that people responded more eagerly and her team became more cohesive when people felt part of the *we.* “This is a magic word,” Angie realized. “I would recommend that others use it more often.”

Leaders foster collaboration and build trust. This sense of teamwork goes far beyond a few direct reports or close confidants. They engage all those who must make the project work—and in some way, all who must live with the results. In today’s virtual organizations, cooperation can’t be restricted to a small group of loyalists; it must include peers, managers, customers and clients, suppliers, citizens—all those who have a stake in the vision.

Leaders make it possible for others to do good work. They know that those who are expected to produce the results must feel a sense of personal power and ownership. Leaders understand that the command-and-control techniques of traditional management no longer apply. Instead, leaders work to make people feel strong,
capable, and committed. Leaders enable others to act not by hoarding the power they have but by giving it away. Exemplary leaders strengthen everyone’s capacity to deliver on the promises they make. As Kathryn Winters learned working with the communications department at NVIDIA Corporation, “You have to make sure that no one is outside the loop or uninvolved in all the changes that occur.” She continually ensures that each person has a sense of ownership for his or her projects. She seeks out the opinions of others and uses the ensuing discussion not only to build up their capabilities but also to educate and update her own information and perspective. “Inclusion (not exclusion),” she finds, “ensures that everyone feels and thinks that they are owners and leaders—this makes work much easier.” Kathryn realized that, when people are trusted and have more discretion, more authority, and more information, they’re much more likely to use their energies to produce extraordinary results.

In the cases we analyzed, leaders proudly discussed teamwork, trust, and empowerment as essential elements of their efforts. A leader’s ability to enable others to act is essential. Constituents neither perform at their best nor stick around for very long if their leader makes them feel weak, dependent, or alienated. But when a leader makes people feel strong and capable—as if they can do more than they ever thought possible—they’ll give it their all and exceed their own expectations. Authentic leadership is founded on trust, and the more people trust their leader, and each other, the more they take risks, make changes, and keep organizations and movements alive. Through that relationship, leaders turn their constituents into leaders themselves.

**ENCOURAGE THE HEART**

The climb to the top is arduous and long. People become exhausted, frustrated, and disenchanted. They’re often tempted to give up. Leaders encourage the heart of their constituents to carry on. Genuine acts of caring uplift the spirits and draw people forward. In his personal-best leadership experience, Ankush Joshi, the service line manager with Informix USA, learned that “writing a personal thank-you note, rather than sending an e-mail, can do wonders.” Janel Ahrens, marcom manager with National Semiconductor, echoed Ankush’s observation. Janel would make notes about important events in other
people’s lives and then follow up with them directly after or simply wish them luck prior to an important event. Every person was “genuinely touched that I cared enough to ask them about how things are going.”

She told us that in her organization “work relationships have been stronger since this undertaking.” Janel’s and Ankush’s experiences are testimony to the power of a “thank you.”

Recognizing contributions can be one-to-one or with many people. It can come from dramatic gestures or simple actions. One of the first actions that Abraham Kuruvilla took upon becoming CEO of the Dredging Corporation of India (a government-owned, private-sector company providing services to all ten major Indian ports) was to send out to every employee a monthly newsletter (DCI News) that was full of success stories. In addition, he introduced, for the first time, a public-recognition program through which awards and simple appreciation notices were given out to individuals and teams for doing great work. Abraham made sure that people were recognized for their contributions, because he wanted to provide a climate in which “people felt cared about and genuinely appreciated by their leaders.”

It’s part of the leader’s job to show appreciation for people’s contributions and to create a culture of celebrating values and victories. In the cases we collected, we saw thousands of examples of individual recognition and group celebration. We’ve heard and seen everything from handwritten thank-yous to marching bands and “This Is Your Life”—type ceremonies. Recognition and celebration aren’t about fun and games, although there is a lot of fun and there are a lot of games when people encourage the hearts of their constituents. Neither are they about pretentious ceremonies designed to create some phony sense of camaraderie. When people see a charlatan making noisy affectations, they turn away in disgust. Encouragement is, curiously, serious business. It’s how leaders visibly and behaviorally link rewards with performance. When striving to raise quality, recover from disaster, start up a new service, or make dramatic change of any kind, leaders make sure people see the benefit of behavior that’s aligned with cherished values. Leaders also know that celebrations and rituals, when done with authenticity and from the heart, build a strong sense of collective identity and community spirit that can carry a group through extraordinarily tough times.
LEADERSHIP IS A RELATIONSHIP

Our findings from the analysis of personal-best leadership experiences challenge the myth that leadership is something that you find only at the highest levels of organizations and society. We found it everywhere. These findings also challenge the belief that leadership is reserved for a few charismatic men and women. Leadership is not a gene and it’s not an inheritance. Leadership is an identifiable set of skills and abilities that are available to all of us. The “great person”—woman or man—theory of leadership is just plain wrong.

Or, we should say, the theory that there are only a few great men and women who can lead others to greatness is just plain wrong. Likewise, it is plain wrong that leaders only come from large, or great, or small, or new organizations, or from established economies, or from start-up companies. We consider the women and men in our research to be great, and so do those with whom they worked. They are the everyday heroes of our world. It’s because there are so many—not so few—leaders that extraordinary things get done on a regular basis, especially in extraordinary times.

To us this is inspiring and should give everyone hope. Hope, because it means that no one needs to wait around to be saved by someone riding into town on a white horse. Hope, because there’s a generation of leaders searching for the opportunities to make a difference. Hope, because right down the block or right down the hall there are people who will seize the opportunity to lead you to greatness. They’re your neighbors, friends, and colleagues. And you are one of them, too.

There’s still another crucial truth about leadership. It’s something that we’ve known for a long time, but we’ve come to prize even more today. In talking to leaders and reading their cases, there was a very clear message that wove itself throughout every situation and every action. The message was: leadership is a relationship. Leadership is a relationship between those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow. It’s the quality of this relationship that matters most when we’re engaged in getting extraordinary things done. A leader-constituent relationship that’s characterized by fear and distrust will never, ever produce anything of lasting value. A relationship characterized by mutual respect and confidence will overcome the greatest adversities and leave a legacy of significance.
Evidence abounds for this point of view. For instance, in examining the critical variables for executive success in the top three jobs in large organizations, Jodi Taylor and Valerie Sessa (1998) at the Center for Creative Leadership found the number one success factor to be “relationships with subordinates.” We were intrigued to find that, even in this nanosecond world of e-everything, opinion is consistent with the facts. In an online survey, respondents were asked to indicate, among other things, which would be more essential to business success in five years—social skills or skills in using the Internet. Seventy two percent selected social skills; 28 percent, Internet skills (FR Roper Starch Survey, 1999). Internet literati completing a poll online realize that it’s not the web of technology that matters the most; it’s the web of people. Leadership is a relationship.

Similar results were found in a study by Public Allies, an AmeriCorps organization dedicated to creating young leaders who can strengthen their communities. Public Allies sought the opinions of eighteen- to thirty-year-olds on the subject of leadership. Among the items was a question about the qualities that were important in a good leader. Topping the respondents’ list is “Being able to see a situation from someone else’s point of view.” In second place is “Getting along well with other people” (Public Allies, 1998).

Success in leadership, success in business, and success in life have been, are now, and will continue to be a function of how well people work and play together. Success in leading will be wholly dependent upon the capacity to build and sustain those human relationships that enable people to get extraordinary things done on a regular basis.

THE TEN COMMITMENTS OF LEADERSHIP

Embedded in The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership are behaviors that can serve as the basis for learning to lead. We call these The Ten Commitments of Leadership (Table 3.1). These ten commitments serve as the guide for our discussion of how leaders get extraordinary things done in organizations and as the structure for what’s to follow. Before delving into the practices and commitments further, however, let’s consider leadership from the vantage point of the constituent. If leadership is a relationship, as we have discovered, then what do people expect from that relationship? What do people look for and admire in a leader? What do people want from someone whose direction they’d be willing to follow?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Commitment</th>
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| Model the Way     | 1. Clarify values by finding your voice and affirming shared ideals.  
|                   | 2. Set the example by aligning actions with shared values.  
| Inspire a Shared Vision | 3. Envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities.  
|                   | 4. Enlist others in a common vision by appearing to share aspirations.  
| Challenge the Process | 5. Search for opportunities by seizing the initiatives and by looking outward for innovative ways to improve.  
|                   | 6. Experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from experience.  
| Enable Others to Act | 7. Foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships.  
|                   | 8. Strengthen others by increasing self-determinations and developing competence.  
| Encourage the Heart | 9. Recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence.  
|                   | 10. Celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community.  

Table 3.1. The Five Practices and Ten Commitments of Leadership  

Notes
1. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are taken from personal interviews or from personal-best leadership case studies written by the respondent leaders. The titles and affiliations of the leaders may be different today from what they were at the time of their case study or publication of this volume. We expect that many have moved on to other leadership adventures while we were writing, or will do so by the time you read this.

References
James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner are preeminent researchers, award-winning writers, and highly sought-after teachers in the field of leadership. Their groundbreaking studies, pioneered in 1983, led them to create a model of leadership that has been embraced by more than one million people around the world.