
Preface: Why Another Book on Leadership?

When I told a friend that I was in the process of writing a book, the first thing he said was: “I’m sure it will be about leadership!” I was taken aback and asked the reason for his suspicion. He answered that most of his colleagues in my age group who have similar careers are writing books about leadership. He is, of course, right. A search for leadership books in Amazon turns up close to 128,000 results. In spite of this wealth of academic and practitioner literature about leadership, however, we are far from a consistent understanding and definition of what leadership is about and even further away from comprehensive and somewhat proven theories that describe its impact and effectiveness. Already in 1997, Warren Bennis (an academic with authority in the field) found more than 850 definitions of leadership that cover a broad range of diverse perspectives and thinking (Bennis & Nanus, 1997).

As compared to other leadership books on the market, this book offers a new perspective on the essential characteristics of leadership and differs from the vast literature of books on leadership in four distinct ways. Firstly, rather than referring to leaders as exceptional people with exceptional skills, I prefer the more inclusive approach of making reference to leaders at all management levels within an organization and across various sectors. Secondly, whereas many leadership books either focus on theoretical issues related to leadership *or* on practical issues based on a leader’s personal experiences, I have chosen to combine these two approaches.

Another distinctive feature relates to the fact that I have held leadership positions throughout my career that span both the profit-oriented and the nonprofit sectors and have involved large global organizations, entrepreneurial firms, as well as microstructures. Hence, rather than focusing on one set of subjective experiences (as is the case in many

leadership books), I am able to share the insights I have gained from my experiences across a variety of sectors and organizational structures. In doing so, I hope to provide you, my readers, with a broader perspective about leadership, as well as show you how to build bridges across sectors that are all too often segregated.

A fourth and final distinctive feature of my new thinking regarding leadership, as compared to conventional leadership thinking and practice, is my strong focus on ethics—a theme which has interested me for many years. I decided to emphasize ethics in this book, since I consider it to be an essential theme for leadership. And more importantly, it reflects my ethical belief that if one is fortunate enough to enjoy high degrees of individual liberty, then he should assume a higher threshold of responsibility in order to use these advantages for the benefit of society as a whole.¹

So why did I write this book? Throughout the diverse career I have enjoyed over the last 30 years, I have always been passionate about ideas, concepts, and theories related to the themes and issues addressed in this book. In addition, I have loved writing ever since my youth when I worked as an editor for a student newspaper and as a volunteer economics journalist for a leading Swiss daily newspaper. I find that in the process of writing, one's thinking improves in clarity. I am occasionally asked by peers and young potential leaders to share experiences, insights, and lessons with them, and I am pleased to reflect on what I learned—both in the positive and the negative sense. In writing this book, my ambition is to contribute to the ongoing debate about leadership by offering a new perspective with the goal of inspiring and encouraging actual and potential leaders.

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Reference

Bennis, W., & Nanus, B. (1997). *Leaders: Strategies for taking charge*. New York: Harper Business.

¹ Rather than using the cumbersome “he/she” option, for simplicity’s sake I have decided to use the more common personal pronoun “he” (and the corresponding adjective “his”) whenever referring to a leader in general terms. Nevertheless, I fully acknowledge the many successful female executives for whom I have great respect and admiration.



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