

## PREFACE

This book merely adds a drop in the ocean of literature already written on leadership. The difference I hope to make with this book is the connection of the theory of leadership to the practice of leadership as a lived experience. I have been fortunate in that I have a foot in both worlds and hope to make a difference with academics who teach and research leadership, as well as practitioners.

Many books on leadership by, or about, famous and effective leaders in business, military, and political life relate successful tales of effective leaders in various situations and contexts. These books highlight leaders' personality traits and successful strategies for leading organizations and people toward success. If these books have a deficiency, from an academic standpoint, it is their lack of grounding in theory.

The result is a varied mix of tales of great leaders in various contexts. Many readers can relate to these books on the basis of profession, context, and/or personality or character traits. However, unless a reader can relate to a specific similar profession, context, situation, or personality and character trait, these books may have limited meaning since they lack a theoretical underpinning that can provide universal insight and understanding to all readers.

Nevertheless, leadership studied purely as an academic concept is abstract. Often books and research articles are littered with the “dos” and “don’ts” of leadership and flowery statements grounded in purely academic terms. Leadership, as practiced in a world chock full of random

events and unpredictable personalities, becomes exponentially more problematic than theory. Most of these books lack the ability to discuss the practice of leadership from ground level, where the “rubber meets the road,” except by relating stories or cases of leaders that the authors are telling second or third hand.

Academic researchers on leadership have noted that the concept of effective leadership is not coherently linked to a specific theory, nor is there agreement among researchers about how the leadership process functions. Therefore, leadership remains something of a mystery despite the hundreds of thousands of pages written about it.

Leadership is an art—just like life. It cannot be reduced to a recipe of dos and don’ts or a set of mechanical behaviors. Nor can it be fully explained by a theory. My thesis is that there is one key ingredient to sustain effective leadership—trust. However, the construct of trust embraces a myriad of concepts that are complicated by interaction with varied personalities and situations encountered in real life.

My intention, as an academic who left academia to co-found and lead an enterprise that grew from 0 to 700 employees in 15 years, is to bridge the gap of abstract leadership concepts to practical application and implementation of leadership, in a non-sterile real world, as a lived experience. My hope is to enrich the study of leadership by discussing it from both the academic and the practitioner view point. Accordingly, this book draws on both my academic research and my active participation as a leader from a “lived experience” perspective.

Furthermore, as the world shrinks through global commerce, cross-cultural understanding of business practices, management and leadership becomes increasingly important. This is true even in a single country as immigrants enter the workforce. Effective leadership necessitates the ability to relate across cultures in order to leverage leadership skills. My experience as founder and CEO of a company located in Southern Mexico also enables me to bridge the divide between cross-culture theory and practice.

## PERSONAL LEADERSHIP MOTIVATIONS

For those who want to become effective leaders, my advice is to begin with an introspective journey to answer the question: Why do I want to be a leader? If the honest answer is: to be the “boss”, to occupy the top of the chain of command, to be respected, to be feared, to be loved, to

be the decision-maker, or anything similar to these responses—I doubt you will be successful. All of these responses derive from a malignant motivation, at least as it relates to effective leadership—ego.

In my opinion, effective leadership cannot be sustained if the motivation to lead emanates from ego. I know this because I lived it. I began my leadership journey brimming and throbbing with ego. Initially, my ego was glowing so brightly that it blinded me to the real objective of leadership. Clearly, the objective of leadership is the sustained success of the organization.

As the everyday battle of business illustrated how difficult it is to be successful in a competitive environment, the glow of my ego began to wane. I was 51 years old and had left a position as a full, tenured professor in academia with a relatively high salary and absolutely no risk. By co-founding a company in a foreign country, I had, perhaps naively, placed myself in a position of complete risk with no guarantees. I had invested my last cent in a business in Mexico that was on the verge of collapse. This situation created several compelling reasons for introspection.

### MY PERSONAL INTROSPECTIVE JOURNEY

As I began to introspect, I realized I had unconsciously developed a strong emotional connection to my colleagues at the company. I developed an enormous respect for what the employees did to live and sustain themselves economically each day. Many literally lived hand-to-mouth. This emotional connection stimulated profound thoughts about what I needed to do as CEO to make the organization successful and what an awesome responsibility I had to employees who had entrusted their economic lives to the decisions I made.

It became clear that there were a handful of key components, for my part as the CEO, to improve our chances of success as an organization. First, I believed I had to earn the trust of my colleagues in the company. This would not be easy, as Mexico is a low-trust country which is built into the fabric of the Mexican culture. The low trust element of society, in general, is further complicated by the rather sordid history of worker exploitation by the *patron* (owner or boss). Beyond that, I was a foreigner which further decreased my odds to earn colleagues' trust. While I may have been respected, and even feared, as a result of my position as CEO, these concepts are not to be confused with trust.

In the following pages, I describe my strategies for earning trust in this low-trust environment. The most important element in earning trust, I discovered, is working to ensure that every employee at every level of the organization knows that my job, as CEO, is to facilitate what they do. Furthermore, all managers in the company were there to do the same so that facilitation by management became an embedded cultural trait.

To put a descriptive tag on this concept of facilitation, it is commonly known in academic circles, at least as I envision it, as servant leadership. This is a somewhat foreign concept of leadership in Mexico, which is known for an autocratic style of management.

To assist with earning trust and to provide credibility to my role as a servant-leader, I was continually selling the idea that we were all in the same boat. Given the labor relations history in Mexico, which is replete with exploitation, this was a difficult sell. The concept of “we are all in the same boat” is often known in academia as stakeholder theory.

Consistent with the emotional connection with followers and the concepts of servant-leadership and stakeholder theory, I felt it was important to stress the idea of empathy toward all employees at all levels. And to further the notion of empathy, I promoted the concept that empathy is a two-way street that should be expressed in both directions in the chain of command as well as bilaterally. That is, everyone in the organization owes respect to everyone else, regardless of their position in the organization. Once again, this was a difficult concept to encourage and diffuse in Mexico given the natural tendency toward autocratic expression in labor relations.

It is trite but true to say, “the tone is set at the top.” It was not sufficient for me, as the CEO, to be the only practitioner of these concepts. I had the responsibility to infuse these concepts in the organization down to the lowest levels of the chain of command.

Finally, a common component of leadership, equity, became an important construct in building trust. This, of course, goes beyond pecuniary rewards to include recognition of employees in various ways.

I believe these components are key to leadership. They were all developed intuitively as I groped my way through the job of CEO. I had not studied leadership, but once I returned to academia I found that the constructs I intuitively discerned were all grounded in academic theory, but I had developed organically and had been tested under fire, so to speak.

The basic model of leadership promoted by this book is one based on building relationships. Trust, as the foundation, is fundamental to all relationships, personal or professional. And leadership is really a social process as some authors have noted.

I had various degrees of success in adhering to my model of leadership. This is the difference between academic theory and lived experience. As I mentioned at the beginning, leadership discussed in purely academic terms is an abstract concept. In practice, the intrusion of random variables, ego, and difficult personalities and conditions complicates the sustainability of effective leadership behaviors identified in academic research.

I know I failed, and failed miserably, at times to live the proposed model. But I learned that if you demonstrate good faith, it is the *pattern* of sincere good faith that is important. Colleagues are forgiving of mistakes, even serious mistakes, if they believe you are authentically engaged and placing the interests of the organization as the number one priority and doing so is also in the long-term well-being of employees.

## THE GOOD NEWS

Personal experience on the job enabled me to intuitively develop a leadership model. I discovered my intuition about leadership was in fact grounded in academic leadership theories. But theory alone cannot explain application and vice versa.

The result is the explanation of a rather unique leadership construct that melds various theories and styles. It is also unique in the sense that innovative performance metrics represent an important and explicit leadership lever in the model. Many books on leadership ignore the integration of performance metrics with leadership.

Furthermore, corporate values should set the behavior parameters by all employees in their efforts to effectively and efficiently accomplish the organizational mission. But if the leader does not fully embrace values in day to day conduct, it weakens the infrastructure of the leadership model. One chapter is devoted to our strategy to communicate corporate values and the importance of aligned behaviors of all employees.

Therefore, the proposed model is holistic. A holistic model integrates organizational culture, values and leadership behaviors to create an interactive and reinforcing process to drive the organization toward success. Sustained organizational success is the measure of effective leadership.

I believe anyone can become an effective leader by authentically and sincerely adopting the constructs of this model, because the model is based on trust. Each and every one of us knows how to act in a trustworthy manner. This is the good news of the book. The difficulty is actually acting in a way that is trustworthy in the heat of the leadership battle.

My hope with this book is to improve academic instruction, research and understanding of leadership. I also hope to provide practitioners with greater insight to theoretical groundings of leadership so that their practice of leadership will improve. I illustrate how leaders in non-profit and governmental organizations can adopt the leadership principles that are promoted in the book. Leadership in these types of organizations is often overlooked, given the bureaucratic philosophy of many of these types of organizations that nurtures manipulative behavior as opposed to leadership.

## BOOK SUMMARY

Chapter 1 discusses many of the leadership typologies generally considered appealing explanations for leadership in academia. Over time one or more of these theories have occupied a place in academic leadership research as the fad of the moment while research evolved. Leadership constructs may manifest themselves slightly differently in specific contexts, but I contend that effective leadership must have as its base a relationship of earned trust between the leader and followers. Furthermore, categorizing leadership theories is not a realistic strategy to understand effective leadership. This is because most behaviors of effective leaders are a mix of academic leadership theories so that the lines become too blurred to use a specific theory as a recipe for leadership. Nevertheless, due to the pervasive use of categorized theories of leadership in the literature, they are discussed in this chapter by leadership typology.

Chapter 2 explores the idea that leadership can have an impact on the organization's performance. Anecdotal evidence supports the common sense idea that leadership does influence organizational outcomes. This chapter reviews past research on the links between organizational performance and leadership. Additionally, some non-academic references about the impact of leadership on organizational performance are included.

Trust is a foundational element of all types of relationships. The concept of trust is woven through the fabric of leadership, which requires

a relationship between leader and followers. Trust, or concepts related to trust, appears explicitly or implicitly in virtually all leadership typologies. My own experience, and the model proposed by the book, is that trust leadership is the crucial aspect to obtaining voluntary followership and to coordinate all collective efforts toward organizational success. Accordingly, Chap. 3 reviews and discusses trust leadership, my experience with it, and how it can be actualized by a leader.

Chapter 3 includes a discussion of behaviors that engender trust. These behaviors are often subsumed under other leadership theories, such as servant leadership, stakeholder theory and stewardship. Equitable behavior from the leader also engenders trust. Therefore, the theoretical underpinnings of how these theories assist with the development of trust are included in this chapter, as well as “lived examples” that illustrate the application.

Chapter 4 discusses the leader’s responsibility for pushing the leadership philosophy to the lowest levels of the organization. How can a leader reach the lowest levels of the organization in a sense-making way to promote organizational philosophy and culture that is congruent with leadership’s vision for organizational values and organizational mission? This chapter summarizes an approach that functioned well in linking values and mission and illustrating expectations of all employees at all levels.

The proper strategic vision, given the context at any point in time, is the first step to organizational success, which is the overarching goal of leadership. From the vision flows the mission, or purpose. Chapter 5 discusses the leader’s role in this critical aspect to organizational success. However, an appropriate vision without the ability to communicate in a sense-making way to employees, may render the vision useless. Ideas on how to make the connection of vision and purpose are provided.

Chapter 6 illustrates the use of metrics to assist with leadership strategies and how to engage employees through metrics. The focus is on linking metrics to strategies to determine the efficacy of strategies and implementation. Given current levels of technology, information overload is common. Linking metrics to strategies focuses management on measurement of what matters and reduces “noise.” Innovative approaches to measurement and well-designed incentive structures assist the leader in guiding organizational performance.

Each of Chaps. 1–6 contains a brief discussion of leadership in government agencies. While research has shown that some government agencies perform effectively and efficiently, there is a general impression

that the preponderance of government agencies are ineffective and inefficient, with the exception of the military. Research has also shown that leadership is a key component to those agencies that do operate effectively. Since government agencies are funded by taxpayer resources, leaders in these agencies have a strong fiduciary duty to the public to ensure effective and efficient operation.

However, since government agencies are established for the purpose to provide a public good or service, and operate without a profit motive, the organizational culture is traditionally distinct from corporate cultures that operate with a profit motive. The discussion in each of these chapters will focus on how leadership concepts discussed in the chapter may be applied in a government context.

The last chapter includes final thoughts on application of the model. My hope is that academics and practitioners will take the basic model and adapt it to their own use and context to become better with respect to teaching or practicing leadership.

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