

Top Ten Leadership Books -- “Advice from the Experts”

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The leadership books below helped me – each helped guide my approach to leading people and organizations. I am absolutely convinced that great leaders are NOT born - they reach that level through relentless pursuit of learning. One of the most important ways we can learn is through reading – reading about how others, especially experts, achieved high levels of effectiveness in leading people. Leadership is tough business. Successful leaders are those with character, who live a code of ethics and values that their organization holds sacred. Successful leaders learn the right skills, do the right thing, and understand it really is “all about people.” The books below are written by experts in this business, with a brief summary of the “golden nuggets” that resonated with me and helped me learn.

1. *The Secret: What Great Leaders Know and Do* (Ken Blanchard and Mark Miller). This book is a fable that provides a great stage for learning leadership principles. It starts with an analogy of “leadership as an iceberg” with above the water line being the skills seen by others, and below the surface (and MUCH larger) being character – both essential for successful leaders. The “secret” is based on a wonderful model of servant leadership based on the following:
 - **S—See the future:** Create a compelling vision, values, heads up/down
 - **E—Engage and develop others:** clear goals, help others grow, learn, leverage strengths, “who does what”
 - **R—Reinvent continuously:** 3 levels – personal, systems and processes, structure
 - **V—Value results and relationships:** both critical for long term success, listen, care deeply, reinforce positive
 - **E—Embody the values:** build trust, enforce values, walk the walk
2. *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (Dale Carnegie). Though written in 1937, this book remains a leadership classic. The book provides alternatives in influencing people thereby, better equipping an individual to meet life’s demands. It emphasizes that leaders must have a deep, driving desire to learn, and a vigorous determination to increase their ability to deal with people. Many “models” or principles of leadership are offered - highlights the importance of choosing a model and enforce self-assessment to ensure compliance (ID what needs to be sustained and improved). Compelling stories reinforce each of the principles described. 4 major parts:
 - Fundamentals techniques in handling people
 - Ways to make people like you
 - How to win people to your way of thinking
 - Being a leader – how to change people without offending

3. *On Becoming a Leader* (Warren Bennis). A leadership classic. One of our nation's preeminent authorities on leadership has written many books – this one is generally considered his best. 10 chapters, filled with essential lessons on leadership emphasized through examples. Understanding the basics of leadership, understanding the four lessons on how to know yourself, moving through chaos, getting people on your side are my favorite parts of this book. No bookshelf should be without it.
4. *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (Stephen Covey). Another leadership classic – compelling in many ways. Covey provides a holistic approach to deciphering problems and a guide to living with fairness, integrity, honesty and human dignity. Of particular interest to me was putting first things first - the quad chart approach to managing what is most important.
 - **Be Proactive.** Be responsible for your own choices, based on principles and values.
 - **Begin with the End in Mind.** Shape a vision of your future and live each day with clear purpose.
 - **Put first things first.** Integrity, values, priorities, Quad II
 - **Think “Win-Win.”** Work toward mutual benefit. Foster support, mutual respect, and interdependence.
 - **Seek First to Understand...** Then to Be Understood. Listen to others with understanding as the intent. Build relationships based on trust.
 - **Synergize.** Work so that whole becomes greater than the parts.
 - **Sharpen the Saw.** Find opportunities for physical, social, emotional, spiritual, and mental renewal.
5. *5 Dysfunctions of a Team* (Patrick Lencioni). Another bestseller. Lencioni provides an analytical approach illustrating how to build and manage a successful team for the reason that no one makes progress, much less succeeds, alone. The book is a fable where all the principles of the book come to life through the story. Discusses why good people with good intentions fail when it comes to team business.
 - Absence of trust: unwillingness in the team members to be genuinely open up with one another about their mistakes and weaknesses.
 - Fear of conflict: inability to engage in unfiltered, passionate debate.
 - Lack of commitment: no buy in and commitment can be expected when opinions have not been aired and debated
 - Avoidance of accountability: without commitment to a clearly defined set of goals, team members will hesitate to call their colleagues on their actions and behaviors that are counterproductive for the team.
 - Inattention to results occurs when team members put their individual needs of their divisions above the collective goals of the team (pg 188-189)
6. *Now, Discover Your Strengths* (Marcus Buckingham & Donald Clifton). A great book that helps readers understand their talents and build them into strengths. A key to effective leadership is knowing your strengths and recognizing how best to capitalize on them – for you and the organization. An effective on-line tool is offered to assist in the discovery. I found the tool very useful, accurate, and helpful in understanding who I am and how I operate.

7. *Rules & Tools for Leaders: A Down-to-earth Guide to Effective Managing* (Perry M. Smith, Major General, USAF, Ret). This book has been on my bookshelf for 15 years. It is an excellent guide and reference book that provides practical and insightful advice in 25 separate chapters, each with a checklist at the end. Chapters address: vision, priorities, taking over, counseling, decision making, saying thank you, time management, and many others.
8. *Right from the Start* (Dan Ciampa and Michael Watkins). Harvard Univ professors Ciampa and Watkins provide a guide to executives addressing pitfalls they may encounter when taking on new senior leadership positions in a company. Some very compelling suggestions for all who are taking over leadership of new organizations. Planning *BEFORE* you take the leadership reins is critical – get it “RIGHT from the start.”
 - General advice:
 - i. First, take advantage of the transition period
 - ii. Second, don’t underestimate the importance of advice and counsel
 - iii. Third, show some empathy for the person you are succeeding (careful how to treat the recently departed)
 - iv. Finally, become a student of leadership (learn to look at the world w/inquisitive eyes, observe, practice, experiment, refine, -- keep learning)
 - Creating momentum: Securing early wins, Laying a foundation, Building credibility
 - Managing Oneself: Self-awareness and style – need for advisors and counselors
 - i. Advice: Knowledge transmitted from expert to leader
 - ii. Counsel: Leader gaining insight thru dialog – counselor understands the leader and the environment (political vs. personal counsel)
9. *The One Minute Manager* (Kenneth Blanchard and Spencer Johnson). An exceptional book told through a parable where the key lessons are so clearly described. Some key takeaways:
 - People who feel good about themselves produce good results.
 - Help people reach their full potential - find them doing something right.
 - Best minute of every day is one spent with people.
 - Take a minute: look at your goals... look at your performance... see if your behavior matches your goals
10. *Who Moved My Cheese* (Spencer Johnson). Profound international bestseller on ways to deal with change – something we will all deal with many times in our lives. An amusing and enlightening parable of four characters (mice - Sniff and Scurry, & Little People - Hem and Haw) that live in a “Maze” and look for “Cheese” to nourish them and make them happy. Cheese is the metaphor for what you want in life, the “Maze” is where you look for what your want. Great lessons on how to deal with change and enjoy more success in your life and in your organization.

Honorable Mention: *Leadership* (Rudy Guillani). Exceptional story told by the former Mayor on New York City during 911. The story has extra appeal because it highlights his experience as a lawyer who became mayor – and his challenges at this difficult transition. Most, but not all, of this book is focused on his time as Mayor of NYC. There are 14 chapters that address different essential parts of his leadership style and experiences. Significant take aways address priorities, relentless preparation, having good people on your staff, developing and communicating strong beliefs, loyalty, funerals being mandatory, standing up to bullies. Very good stuff. It is written like he talks - so very easy to read.

Some Favorite Quotes

"It is not the critic who counts: not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again and again, because there is no effort without error or shortcoming, but who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spends himself for a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who knew neither victory nor defeat."

One of the most requested quotes... Ted Roosevelt "Citizenship in a Republic," Speech at the Sorbonne, Paris, April 23, 1910

"If you are the leader, your people expect you to create their future. They look into your eyes, and they expect to see strength and vision. To be successful, you must inspire and motivate those who are following you. When they look into your eyes, they must see that you are with them."

General Gordon R. Sullivan, Hope is not a Method (1996)

"When I am faced with a decision—picking somebody for a post, or choosing a course of action—I dredge up every scrap of knowledge I can. I call in people. I phone them. I read whatever I can get my hands on. I use my intellect to inform my instinct. I then use my instinct to test all this data. "Hey, instinct, does this sound right? Does it smell right, feel right, fit right?"

General Colin Powell, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff (89-93), The Leadership Secrets of Colin Powell

"Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to he wants to do it."

Dwight D. Eisenhower's definition of leadership.

"I believe you are as brave, patriotic and just as the great prototype Washington; as unselfish, kind-hearted and honest as a man should be; but the chief characteristic is the simple faith in success which I can liken to nothing else than the faith a Christian has in a Savior. My only points of doubt were in your knowledge of grand strategy, and of books of science and history, but I confess your common sense have supplied all these. *I know wherever I was that you thought of me, and if I got in a tight place you would come if alive.*"

Letter from General W. T. Sherman to General U. S. Grant 10 March 1864 - value of trusted friendship.

"Retain unwavering faith that you can and will prevail in the end, regardless of the difficulties AND, at the same time, have the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be."

Stockdale Paradox attributed to VADM James Stockdale through book written by Jim Collins, Good To Great