
Introduction

THIS BOOK HAS ONE CORE PURPOSE: to help you to lead better, *everywhere* you lead, whether as a supervisor, chief executive officer (CEO), parent, principal, or pastor. It offers you an opportunity to reflect on what's working for you and what could work better. Nearly every sentence in this book has been written to be relevant for you, whether you run a business, sit on a board, raise children, or do all of the above. It prompts you to examine and evaluate how you lead by offering ideas, stories, and strategies that will help you lead better. All of these ideas and stories are about the human dynamics of the extraordinary social animals that we call people. Consider a personal example.

In August of 1998 I had a fun-house experience of leadership. It was as if I were standing in front of one of those curvy mirrors so that I was seeing myself all out of proportion. It was disorienting and funny at the same time. Let me explain.

I was one of the crafters of my wife's first truly big speech, her acceptance of our party's nomination for the position of attorney general of Michigan. It was an extraordinary moment for this political newcomer in relationship to her supporters. Many delegates came in supporting her, but many, many more left that day committed to her. She roared the refrain of that speech: "I'll take your case." They heard

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in her voice, and she heard in her voice, her commitment to serve them, to put them before her own needs or interests.

Now an extraordinary power source comes online when a person is clear with himself and others that he is there to serve. That power flows as long as the leader and those led share clarity of purpose. A servant leader repeatedly orients himself toward the needs of others and taps the power that comes from having a big purpose. This clarity of purpose is what causes the parent of an angry adolescent to take a deep breath and let it pass or to clean up behind the toddlers at 11:00 p.m. for the tenth time that day. It is the clarity about service that causes the doctor to answer every single page. This clarity causes a shop owner to anguish for weeks before laying off workers. And clarity about service gives a school principal the energy to return frustrated parents' calls well after dinnertime. I am convinced that on that day at the Lansing Center, attorney Jennifer Granholm's pronouncement, "I'll take your case," cemented her sense of service as her guiding purpose and source of strength.

In the months leading up to the convention, I, too, had a sense of purposeful and powerful service, for I was helping Jennifer achieve something great. During this lead-up, I had also found myself wrestling with my jealous ego as I watched Jennifer cast in the limelight. But now I was flushed with pride and joy as she delivered a great speech. And this great speech delivered her well down the path to victory. I walked her offstage, exulting, smiling, swollen happily in the moment.

The lesson of service was about to become more graphic. Our girls, Kate, eight years old, and Cece, who was seven, beamed at Jennifer. The crowd was howling, hooting, and loving this little family, and it swept us up. Jack, a couple months shy of one year old, was not impressed. Neither was he impressed when the main actor, Geoffrey Fieger, the nominee for governor, strode to the stage to the labor-packed crowd's wild applause. In fact, Jack was crying, and, let me put it plainly, he stunk. Like any self-respecting parent, I could predict the hideous color and utter liquidity of what was inside this poor baby's diaper. And with him in this condition it just didn't seem right to foist him on my mom and younger sister, who were helping out. Much as I wanted to hear Fieger's speech, Jack was not about to wait, so we ducked out through the heavy black curtains behind the stage.

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After what seemed like a quarter-mile walk, I found a bathroom, pulled out the plastic mat, got down on the tiled floor, and took care of the ugly green business. In that little hall of mirrors, I could see this odd reflection of myself and didn't know what to think. I was proud of Jennifer and my work in support of her; on the other hand, I was frustrated and—I'm not proud to say this—a little bitter over the way I was experiencing this historic moment in our family's life. I figured I had missed Fieger's speech by now. And there was Jack, oblivious and wonderful, as babies are. I started laughing at the absurdity of it all, felt myself lighten up, and watched a smile spread across Jack's face. Or is memory tricking me: was *Jack* the one who lightened up and I followed *his* lead?

In the eight years since that day, I have often reflected on the gift of that moment. It was as if life, or God if you please, was saying, "I am trying to help you see that you can serve and lead in a really different way than *you* might think you want to, think you should, or even think you can. Be present. Right here. Pay attention, right now, in the middle of the little stuff." This was by no means a once and for all lesson. Instead, especially in my supportive role with my governor-wife, I have had to learn that lesson over and over again. But that time with Jack offered a singular moment and taught me about the unusual three-way intersection where leading, serving, and being human meet.

This book is about that intersection in the lives of human leaders. Many leaders think they can have the leading without the serving and the being human. When they think of leadership, they think of being in charge, of having it under control, and of being seen as such; in some respects, they expect to be served more than to serve. They pretend to others (and probably to themselves) that they can put on the blue suit of leadership and make it happen. They think they need to keep their human side safely hidden away and can protect themselves by doing so. They pretend there are clear answers and that they have them. They hide from others (and, again, often from themselves) their human sides: doubt, jealousy, fear, big emotions such as sadness, and even small ones such as silliness or momentary embarrassment. They think a good agenda is the same as a good meeting. A clean desk is the same as an efficient business. They still *tell* more than they *listen*. Consequently, their people do listen and promptly head back to their

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offices, where they say of the boss, “He still doesn’t get it.” Such leaders think people can be directed, told, and moved like chess pieces. And they don’t see that as a result they get lip service, not customer service; compliance, not commitment; what they *want* to hear instead of what they *need* to hear.

On their bad days, these leaders—I’ll call them that, for they really do *want* to lead—make people’s lives miserable. At some level in their thinking it seems they want everyone to think, speak, and act like them, and because this is impossible they can be neglectful and even abusive of those who differ. Because people spend so much of their lives at work, such managers can cause them great anxiety and even illness, and the people who report to them go home with negative energy that *will* find some outlet. Many of us have lived in homes where we “breathed the secondhand smoke” from a parent’s or spouse’s toxic boss. These are the extreme cases. I don’t believe most such managers have any idea how hurtful they can be.

I say “they” do this, but this book is about how “we” lead humans in such inhuman ways. We can change, and we must.

In the fiercely competitive world in which we work, leaders need whole human effort. Yes, we need people’s time and their hands on the keyboard or the product. But if we’re going to produce, sell, and thrive, we also desperately need their creativity, their fearlessness, their spirit, their patience to work with other fallible and sometimes annoying humans, and their sweat. That’s all *human* stuff. We can’t *tell* people to give that level of effort, that much of themselves. We can’t bribe them to do that. We can’t for very long trick them or scare them into it.

The only enduring way to get humans’ best stuff is to *be* fully human ourselves. And being human means sometimes dealing with a stinky diaper. It means facing some of our stinky behaviors, thoughts, and feelings—such as feeling ignored or forgotten or wrong. And it also means we get to face the splendid possibility that we could be much better and happier leaders if we quit doing what we think we should do, what we’ve always done, what we’re comfortable doing, and instead do what our people need us to do.

I am inviting you to consider a more human leadership. It’s good for them and good for us. It is a leadership that in its essence lets us be the same person at work that we are at home or in church. It is a leadership that lets us just be us—the person with bumps and rough edges

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but also the person who can always improve a little more, the person who *isn't* entirely sure but takes action. We get to be the person whose kid drives us nuts but who cries tears of joy at that kid's graduation. We get to be the guy who is driven bonkers by a salesman who never seems to listen, but we also get to be the person who "high-fives" him when he gets better results than we could have imagined. This kind of human leadership lets us be the person who can get what our hearts most desire: a connection with other people in which we make each other better and do something together that we could not have done alone, a person not perfect but perfectly alive.

Leadership is often made out to be a BIG THING; leaders are superhuman, grand figures who make dramatic moves that they know are right! But really leadership for any of us is lived out in seemingly small, always human, little things. For instance, you could not watch Colin Powell's public statements before and after President Bush's decision to lead us into war with Iraq and not see that there were deeply human and personal struggles at play. Some of the struggles were clearly internal—a general turned secretary of state balancing his most cherished value of loyalty against his values of openness, candor, and conscience. And of course much of Secretary Powell's struggle was external, bound up in the ideological battle within the White House. It was an ideological struggle but completely played out by people, and therefore these were personal struggles. Although the *audience* is huge when it comes to players such as Secretary Powell, General Electric's Jack Welch, or Michigan's Jennifer Granholm, the *stage* is very similar to any leadership drama that involves a group of human beings.

So, because the basic nature of human beings does not change, the little, personal stuff of leadership matters. Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Buddha, and Jesus did some of their most amazing work in the little moves in the midst of it all. So do you! Little human moves matter. A small, serious conversation with an employee can turn him or her around. Or some clear thinking about your vision of success can get you back on track. Changing a baby's diaper might be the small human moment that will change the way you lead and follow. This book attempts to bring leadership back down to earth. It offers everyday stories that illuminate some of the best ideas—modern and ancient—about *real* human leadership.

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The ideas flow from a number of sources. Many come from my direct experiences practicing leadership *of* teams and *on* teams in many different settings. Some of the lessons come from managing in the public sector, others from running a small business, and many from a practice of executive coaching and consulting to large and small businesses and nonprofits. For the past eight years I have also had the opportunity to watch my wife lead in the highly public roles of attorney general and governor of the state of Michigan. And let me hasten to add that since this is a book about *human* leadership many of the most useful lessons come from my *core* human experiences: growing up in a family of seven, raising three children, helping raise three mentees, and coaching many children (and sometimes their parents) in basketball. As you will soon see, some of the dilemmas faced by governors or CEOs distinctly mirror the choices faced by parents with regard to their adolescents.

The book is divided into eight chapters, each dedicated to an important facet of leadership activity. Although leadership takes place in the middle of the muddle of a day spent at work, at home, or at the school board, and though leadership is practiced in small things, anyone who leads must have a sense of direction or destination—a vision. So we begin by looking at vision, quite literally: effective leaders are continually developing and sharing a *picture* of where they want us to go together. We'll see the power of vision at the human level—not something grandiose and esoteric but vision as a practical and engaging everyday strategy. Vision is useless without a strategy to communicate it, so chapter 2 turns to issues of communication.

One of the reasons the old-fashioned, "boss knows best" style of leadership is dead is that people in authority simply can't control information flow anymore. Corporate executives compete with Wall Street analysts and bloggers, who appear inside and outside their companies. Parents have to grapple with kids getting their information from a hundred TV channels and a thousand Web sites. Even pastors compete for mobile followers who can turn to online Bibles or the life interpretations of Oprah, Rush, or a hundred other meaning makers. Competitors know what you're paying your people, and your people can find out exactly what the competition is paying.

The need for quality communication *from* you and quality com-

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munication *with* others has never been greater. In this world you can hardly “tell” them anything that they will accept just because *you* are saying it. Furthermore, the world is telling them that their opinion matters. So shareholders, citizens, customers, employees, and even kids increasingly expect to be consulted, not told. Never have the skills of communication been more essential for good leadership.

Of course, leadership is less about what you say than about whether it gets them to move. Leadership is fundamentally about motivating them, or “motor-vating” them, getting their engines running strong. So chapter 3 offers some critical dos and don’ts of great motivation, and it also lays bare some of the things we all do that deflate our teams, our organizations, and even our families.

The fourth and fifth chapters speak to the very heart of a great leader. The leaders we most want to follow seem, as we say in the vernacular, to “have it all together.” By this we mean that they are themselves no matter the context; they communicate their values and ideas and intentions clearly. And their actions track their words. Because they have grown comfortable with themselves and don’t seem to be acting or hiding, they also seem more at ease with others, neither having to please them nor having to judge them. They engage others in a straightforward way. While we tend to think of this kind of “together” character as something people simply are or aren’t, this chapter offers questions to ask and practices to pursue in achieving that kind of wholeness.

No account of human leadership could be complete without looking at our stubborn tendency to mess up! So chapter 5 offers insight into “doing the right thing.” It invites us to step back from our own situations to honestly examine what happens when authorities do unethical things. And because “to err is human,” it offers workable human strategies to personally rebound and help our teams advance, even when we feel like we are in shameful retreat. This chapter offers a number of ways to build personal capacity to do the right thing and thus develop the credibility to lead and the opportunity to really enjoy a good life.

Most of us have heard ourselves say, “If I were the boss . . .” or “If I was governor . . .” or “When I become a parent, believe me, I’ll never . . .” Such statements flow from our *greatest* misconception about leadership, namely, that having authority makes leadership

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simple. Anyone who has been a parent, a principal, or a CEO knows that for every tool of control that authority brings there also comes a constraint. Once we become the boss, we are observed and heard and followed in a different way. So, whether we are leading *as* the authority figure, or *with*, or perhaps even *against* that figure of authority, we do best to understand the dynamics at play. Chapter 6 offers insight into the nature of authority—ways we can gain it, use it, and avoid some of its pitfalls.

One of the most important dimensions of authority is managing the boundaries of organizations. Parents, coaches, and bosses spend time and energy resolving internal disputes and managing the borders with those outside. We are social animals—from beginning to end. So we're drawing lines: he's in, she's out, okay, he's out, she's back in. When we don't pay attention to who is getting pushed to the edges—and it's darned easy not to pay attention—our organization loses energy and ideas. We turn potentially productive partners into indifferent or even negative actors. Inclusion thus becomes a critical leadership task if we are to advance the health of a group. Why is it that we have such a hard time keeping everyone in the game? Chapter 7 offers some ideas about how exclusion works and some constructive strategies for building more powerful and inclusive teams.

The final chapter brings us face-to-face with our most wonderful, mysterious, vexing, and ever-present friend: the ego. Can you possibly understand the leadership of Phil Jackson, Ted Turner, Eva Perón, or any CEO or mayor or congressperson without factoring in a great quantity of ego? Ego drives performance. It's fuel in the tank. But then we also know about "big egos" too. We all have seen our share of egoists, egotists, and egomaniacs. Of course, the ego most leaders seem to think and talk about the least is their own. So this chapter offers ways to think about the (not so) little character inside each of us that says, "What about me?" It's the voice that says, "I am" or "I can" or "This is me. I did this." Chapter 8 offers ways to tap the ego's wonderful power without being trapped by its wily ways.

Were it not for ego, I wouldn't have opened with the story about Jack at the convention because I would merely have been changing a little baby's diaper. But ego is ubiquitous. And so ego at that moment raised questions about my significance, my role and importance. I have never been able to get far from ego. If conscience has always

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been hovering over one shoulder, ego has been pretty squarely riding on the other. Life offers us a wonderful chance as humans to play with these kinds of dynamics—working with our ego over one shoulder and our vision and values over the other. A life of leadership invites us both to work in our minds and to work with those we hope to lead. There is nothing like leadership to heighten the importance of our inner and outer journeys. For how we manage ourselves and how we choose to intervene do not just impact our own feelings and fates but allow us to make a great difference to our kids, our staffs, and the organizations we care about.

So this book offers itself as a kind of guide to the two journeys: the adventure of trying to move *others* to accomplish great things; and the companion journey *within* through which you can become the most together, genuine, human, and effective leader you can be.