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BECOMING THE  
NEW  
BOSS



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THE NEW LEADER'S  
GUIDE TO  
SUSTAINED SUCCESS

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Naphtali Hoff, PsyD



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## INTRODUCTION

# A New Experience

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*Experience is the name every one gives to their mistakes.*

OSCAR WILDE



Congratulations! Your recent promotion to a position of leadership may very well represent the most exciting moment in your professional career. As an executive, you will have the opportunity to impact your organization and its employees on many levels, and to serve as a primary catalyst for its future growth and success.

In this role, you will be able to implement your vision and your dreams. Now, instead of following others' directions, you will give them. You have also "made it" and will now enjoy many financial as well as social benefits, such as the increased respect and attention that go along with your new post.

While leading others can be very exciting and fulfilling, you will likely also find it to be challenging, perhaps very much so. You will need to do a lot of learning to become familiar with your new position, your team, the workplace culture that you'll walk into, and what needs to happen for you to be successful. This new job places you on a different plane, with tasks and responsibilities that can be more demanding and stress-inducing than anything that you have ever before experienced at work.

Trust me. I have been there.



I had just signed on to become principal of an elementary school in a new community following more than a decade as a teacher and second-tier administrator. Though I had done much to ready myself for this moment, I had mixed feelings. On the one hand, I was a pretty confident guy and believed that I deserved this new job. I had worked hard through the years

and felt that my abilities would hold me in good stead. I was excited about the opportunities that top-level leadership offered, particularly in a school setting where I could positively impact the lives of hundreds of children, their families, and their community.

And yet, I was also uneasy and unsure. My new job included many responsibilities that I had never been required to meet, at least not at this level. Sure, I had had superiors before, but I had never reported to a full board of directors, not to mention my many new unofficial bosses, such as parents and community leaders. And yes, I had previously managed staff. But they had been a small group of part-time teachers; nowhere near the fifty-plus members of my new, predominantly full-time faculty.

Perhaps most importantly, I was filling the shoes of a decorated principal: a man who had built his fledgling school, housed in a small strip mall, into a robust, National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence with nearly 350 students. He was well loved and respected, an elderly gentleman with a grandfatherly persona and robust energy. He had retired under challenging conditions; his wife was diagnosed with a terminal illness from which she passed before the school year ended. The school community needed time to heal, let alone to get acclimated to a new sheriff.

At the same time, my predecessor's exit also fostered new hopes from those in the school community who had been pining for changes and improvements in recent years. These people included a number of board members and those on the head search committee. They had waited—many impatiently—for the day that a new change agent would be brought in to address their concerns. This was made very clear to me during the interview process and in informal conversation.

The fact that I entered the new position under such conditions certainly complicated things for me. Nor was my situation simplified by the fact that I was relocating to a new community together with my family and would have four of my own children at the school.

So many questions gnawed at me.

- How could I gain acceptance and respect?
- What should I do to demonstrate capacity without turning the entire school on its head?

- How might I shore up my weaker areas without showing frailty?
- Who would I turn to when things got rough for my family or me?
- Perhaps most importantly, had I made the right move in uprooting my family from the comfort of the life that we had built to start from scratch in a new community over 700 miles away?

Needless to say, it was not all smooth sailing from there. I took my lumps and more than once had to shift into some form of damage control. Despite the early struggles and learning pains, my time at this school was rewarding in many ways. We accomplished much in such areas as mission clarification, curriculum enhancement, professional development, teacher supervision, student assessment, positive behavior programming, communication, public relations, fiduciary oversight, and more.

None of this could have happened had I not learned from my mistakes and changed course. As I gained experience, I began to learn how better to galvanize our forces. Instead of trying to be a one-man tour de force, I learned to how to listen better and lead our talented team of administrators, faculty, and lay leaders in the pursuit of our strategic priorities.

To illustrate, I would like to share an old story that you may have heard about a reporter who was interviewing a successful bank president. He wanted to know the secret of the man's success. "Two words," he was told; "right decisions."

"And how do you make right decisions?" asked the reporter.

The reply: "One word: Experience."

The reporter pressed on. "And how do you get experience?" he asked.

To which the banker replied, "Two words: Wrong decisions."

My goal in writing this volume is to help you gain the benefits of experience without having to make too many bad decisions along the way. In the coming chapters, I will share many of the approaches that helped me navigate through my difficult beginning and lead our school into its next phase of success. Mind you, some of these took time to learn and refine. I often

reflect on how much easier things may have been had I known more about them earlier on. That is why I wrote this book; so that other new leaders can hit the ground running.

In the pages that follow, we will explore together some of the most important leadership issues with which new leaders grapple. These include:

- The essence of leadership, and how it differs from management
- The importance of developing a leadership character
- How to make a great impression and start off on the right foot
- Ways to develop deep, balanced workplace relationships
- When and how to approach change
- Strategies to avoid burnout
- And much more

Remember, as a new leader you have a great opportunity in front of you to guide, direct and inspire others to new heights. But no great leader can go it alone, especially at the beginning.

It is my hope in writing this book is to provide you, the new leader, with tools, guidance, and support that will help you make a low-turbulence, high-reward leadership transition that often evades new leaders.



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## SECTION 1



# UNDERSTANDING THE LEADER'S ROLE

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## CHAPTER 1

# What's All the Fuss about Leadership, and What Is It Anyway?

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*Leadership is influence; nothing more, nothing less.*

JOHN C. MAXWELL



Perhaps more so than in any era of human history, modern society has placed a pronounced emphasis on the study of human leadership. Few foci have consumed the collective interest of university researchers, think tanks, executive coaches, organizational consultants, business magnates, and internet bloggers more than identifying the special mix of qualities and actions that produce and sustain strong leadership.

The topic's currency is obvious enough. At no time in our historical annals has there been a greater demand for capable, dynamic leadership—at least on such broad a scale—as there is today. Modern society has engendered the vast proliferation of large organizational structures, including governments, business corporations, and educational institutions. Each of these entities depends heavily on the skills and successes of key leaders to drive their enterprises forward.

Great leaders increase profit, drive up customer satisfaction, generate higher levels of engagement in their employees, reduce employee turnover, and develop stronger employees.<sup>1</sup> Logically, organizations make the study and recruitment of effective management an essential, ongoing effort, and invest heavily in programs and services to nurture and assess their chief executives.

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<sup>1</sup> Zenger, John H., Joseph R. Folkman, Robert H. Jr. Sherwin, and Barbara A. Steel. *How to Be Exceptional: Drive Leadership Success by Magnifying Your Strengths*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2012.

As I see it, leadership matters today more than ever before, in part for the following reasons.

- **Shifting, less structured marketplace.** Today's work environment is more agile, dexterous, and virtual than ever before, with many offsite employees and less emphasis on traditional reporting and organizational hierarchies. Leading becomes more challenging in less structured environments.
- **Navigating in uncharted waters.** We live in a time of constant change, with an ever-increasing demand for product development and acceptance in a fast-paced global economy.
- **Heightened expectations.** Today's stakeholders are better informed and more demanding. They are less inclined to tolerate incompetence and wait patiently for evidence of success. Leaders today are expected to hit the ground running, but do so with short leashes.
- **Too many failures.** We have all observed longstanding bastions of stability, such as government and big business, fail before our eyes. Traditional organizational values have come under fierce attack, and often seem to lack a moral compass by which to determine right and wrong.

These challenges, as well as many others, can make organizational leadership a daunting, perplex task, particularly for new leaders.

But what exactly is leadership?

In its essence, leadership comprises two primary, related components: social influence and the maximization of others' efforts. Influence is about winning people over to a new way of thinking and practice, through questioning, idea sharing, collaboration, and modeling. It emphasizes persuasion and motivation over coercion.

Influence occurs primarily through emotional connections, such as when we share triumphant or challenging times together. It also develops when leaders routinely demonstrate feelings of appreciation, care, concern, and empathy.

In a speech to graduating cadets at the Royal British Military Academy in

1944, General Dwight D. Eisenhower said: “You must know every single one of your men. It is not enough that you are the best soldier in that unit, that you are the strongest, the toughest, the most durable, the best equipped, technically—you must be their leader, their father, their mentor, even if you’re half their age. You must understand their problems. You must keep them out of trouble; if they get in trouble, you must be the one who goes to their rescue. That cultivation of human understanding between you and your men is the one part that you must yet master, and you must master it quickly.”

Clearly, this message has been embraced by the United States military as well. Simon Sinek is a best-selling author on team-building. He learned some of his core leadership beliefs from Lt. Gen. George Flynn, a United States Marine Corps official. Flynn was explaining what makes the Corps so extraordinarily tight-knit, to the point that they willingly entrust their lives to one another. He told Sinek that when Marines line up for their food each day, the most junior officers go first, following in rank order. Their leaders eat last. Such procedures are not recorded in the Marine Corps handbook or procedural code. Nor are they expressed at roll call. It’s just the way that Marine leadership views their responsibility.

Many people think leadership is about rank, power, and privilege. Marines, however, maintain that true leadership is the willingness to place others’ needs above your own. That’s why Sinek titled his 2014 book *Leaders Eat Last: Why Some Teams Pull Together and Others Don’t*.<sup>2</sup> True leadership, he writes, is about empowering others to achieve things they didn’t believe possible.

By prioritizing the well-being of their people, exceptional organizations motivate their workers to give everything they’ve got to advance the organization. Peter Drucker once described it as, “lifting a person’s vision to high sights... raising... a person’s performance to a higher standard...(going) beyond its normal limitations.”

*Many people think leadership is about rank, power, and privilege. Marines, however, maintain that true leadership is the willingness to place others’ needs above your own.*

<sup>2</sup> Sinek, Simon. *Leaders Eat Last: Why Some Teams Pull Together and Others Don’t*. Kbh.: Nota, 2014.

In addition to the aforementioned qualities, strong leaders possess other attributes that help them achieve great success.

- **Driven.** Great leaders are driven. Drive is the engine that turns ideas into action and action into results. It also motivates us to forge ahead, to advance in the face of opposition, disappointment, and setbacks, and to reach new levels of success.
- **Inspired.** Strong leaders are inspired leaders. They use their influence to guide, advise, and motivate their teams, helping their people see beyond the moment, and get past their perceived obstacles, false assumptions, and limiting beliefs.
- **Credible.** Productive leaders are credible, which means that others believe in them and their message. They are seen as experts in their field and deserve to be taken seriously. Such credibility does not develop overnight; it occurs when leaders regularly inspire trust in others and demonstrate great personal capacity.
- **Comfortable taking risk.** Leadership requires regular risk-taking. Everything from budgeting to staffing to programming carries some element of risk. This is certainly true for the more complex, hazardous tasks that define leadership, such as crafting a new vision and shifting course. Effective leaders understand that risk-taking is central to their jobs and are willing to make tough decisions as needed.
- **Build from strength.** Great leaders can pinpoint what they and their company do best and stay focused on building from strength. Steve Jobs, the late Apple CEO, found a company in dysfunction when he returned to Apple in 1997, twelve years after being fired. His extensive observations revealed a rudderless ship that lacked discipline and focus. Jobs called together his managers and told them to stop all production. He then drew a box with four quadrants. Over the two columns, he wrote “desktop” and “laptop.” He labeled the two rows “home” and “business.” He said that Apple would create the best products in each of those four categories and nothing more, at least for the time being. We all know how the story turned out from there.