

The Alternative

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Dear Reader,

Writing on Leadership is not a new phenomenon but in recent decades it is a genre that has come into its own, taking aim at the whole population. In the past, a few people were thought to be leaders; the classic work on the topic was Machiavelli's *The Prince* in which the leader was instructed to be clever and ruthless. If you wanted to be a leader, you had to make sure both that everyone was in back of you and that your back was protected. Only a very unusual person would have the ability and the desire to take on the identity of leader.

As Barbara Ehrenreich's essay points out, a literature on being successful in life and work has broken free from the self-help books. This literature is mainly the product of business executives who advise workers on how they too can become successful and rich. In some ways, this writing is quintessentially American, that is, it is a condemnation of the sin of being poor. If anyone can become rich by following a few simple rules, then there is no excuse for anybody living in poverty.

Gabriel Moran surveys books and ideas on Leadership. Though skeptical of the image of leader, he acknowledges the need for the kind of contribution which leaders are said to provide. Like many terms in the modern world, leadership is a secularized version of what comes out of religious history.

Marcus Buckingham, one of the more interesting writers in this area, gives a brief sketch of the essence of leadership.

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THE RULES

By Barbara Ehrenreich

There they are, massed in every airport bookstore, their titles lunging out to slap you in the face. Some are straight-out commands, like **First Break All the Rules** and **Now Discover Your Strengths**. Others pose quirky metaphorical questions: **How Full is Your Bucket?** or **Who Moved My Cheese?** Several of them trumpet forth a kind of numerological majesty: **The 8th Habit** or **The Five Dysfunctions of a Team**. All lay claim to the almost infinite territory of **Work and life**, as in the **Cheese** subtitle: **An A-Mazing Way to Deal With Change in Your Work and in Your Life**. Clearly you are not in the literature section, or even in ordinary diet and mood-boosting self-help. This is the bustling genre of business success books, descended from Dale Carnegie's mid-twentieth century *oeuvre* and ready to transform you into a C.E.O. now.

Herewith are The Essential Principles of Business Success Books, conveniently condensed for consumption in five minutes or less.

1. Be positive, upbeat and perky at all times. Once the job of corporate functionaries was to make things happen. Today, their mission is apparently to keep their colleagues company in the office. **How Full is Your Bucket** asserts: **Ninety-nine out of a hundred people report that they want to be around more positive people**. Every book in the genre enjoins a relentless positivity of outlook.

In fact, negative thoughts - as toward the boss who laid you off or passed you over for a promotion - will not only be visible to your comrades, they **can** be harmful to your health and might even shorten your life span. **If** you happen to be downsized, right-sized or outsourced again, just grin and bear your smiley face to the next potential employer, as the happy folks in **We Got Fired...And It's the Best Thing That Ever Happened to Us** advise.

2. Avoid victimism and anyone who indulges in it. People who fail at being positive - and dwell morbidly on their last demotion or downsizing, for example - easily fall into what **The 8th Habit** diagnoses as **The** mind set of victimism and culture of blame. **Avoid** them, even though **As** very easy to hang out and share suffering with people who are committed to lose. **Poor** people, we discover in **Secrets of the Millionaire Mind** are that way because they choose to play the role of victim. Avoid them too.

3. Being positive and upbeat not only improves your health and popularity, it actually changes the world. Yes, your thoughts can alter the physical universe,

which according to **A**the Secrets of the Millionaire Mind, **@**is akin to a big mail-order department, **A**n which **A**ou order what you get by sending out energetic messages to the universe. **@**The author ascribes this wisdom to the **A**aw of Attraction, **@**which was explained scientifically in the 2001 book **A**he Ultimate Secret to Getting Everything You Want. **@****A**thoughts exert a gravitational pull on the world, so that whenever you think something the thought attracts its physical equivalent. **@**If you think money -- in a totally urgent, focused and positive way, of course -- it will come flying into your pockets.

4. Although the plot of **A**Who Moved My Cheese? **@**centers on two tiny, maze-dwelling cheese-dependent people named Hem and Haw, there are also two subsidiary characters, both mice. When the cheese is moved, the tiny people waste time ranting and raving **A**t the injustice of it all, **@**as the book's title suggests. But the mice just scurry off to locate an alternative cheese source. They prevail, we learn, because they **A**ept life simple. **@**They don't overanalyze or overcomplicate things. In the mysteriously titled **@**BQ! The Question Behind the Question, **@**we are told that questions beginning with **A**ho **@** or **A**hy **@** are symptoms of **A**ictim thinking. **@**Happily, rodents are less prone to it than humans. That may be why we never learn the identity of the Cheese Mover; the who-question reveals a dangerous human tendency to **A**veranalyze, **@**which could lead you to look upward, resentfully, toward the C-suites where the true Masters of the Universe dwell.

5. According to the **A**th Habit, **@**n the old days, it was good enough to be effective. But **A**eing effective... is no longer optional in today's world -- it's the price of entry to the playing field. **@**The endlessly churning, cutthroat, 21st century business world demands greatness - which means being not only enthusiastic but passionate about your work. Presumably, you will pull all-nighters, neglect your family -- whatever it takes. And when you do lose your job, you will embrace your next one -- in say, modular building construction - with the same raging passion for greatness.

There you have it the highly condensed secrets of business success. If you find them immoral, delusional or insulting to the human spirit, you should humbly consider the fact that, to judge from the blurbs on the backs of these books, they have won the endorsement of numerous actual C.E.O.'s of prominent companies. Maybe the books tell us what these fellows want their underlings to believe. Or - and this is the truly scary possibility -- maybe the principles embody what the C.E.O.'s themselves believe, and it is in fact the immoral, the delusional and the verbally challenged who are running the show.

LEADERSHIP AND POWER

By Gabriel Moran

I have always had a struggle with the idea and word leader. The literal meaning of the term is unambiguous: it is a spatial description of one person leading and other people following. Although the origin of the idea is lost to earliest human history, it seems likely that leader and follower had a military origin. In conflicts between neighboring tribes, the biggest, bravest, meanest individual would have been the leader who would command: follow me. The image of military leader shifted as wars became bigger and more technologized. Even in World War I, military leaders were, if not up front, at least a few hundred yards behind the lines. One of the more frightening aspects of modern warfare is that leaders can sit comfortably in another world, not sharing in the dangers and horrors of the war itself. George W. Bush likes to think of himself as the leader of the war he started. Good. Someone put an M16 in his hands and let him lead a few night patrols in Mosul or Basra.

Leadership, of course, can be used in a metaphorical way. The military image had passed into the political realm as early as Plato's *Republic* in which the guardian class emerged from military training to be guided by a vision of justice for the whole *polis* or community. The migration of the term leader to the business world was a late nineteenth-century novelty. The word was first used for a small circle of men whose names are familiar from their conscience-salving philanthropic organizations: Rockefeller, Carnegie, Vanderbilt, Ford. As corporations expanded, the man in charge -- the chief executive -- took on the mantle of leader. Now the leader did not have to risk his life or his life savings; one just needed an appointment by a cooperative board of trustees.

Although the business leader as CEO has come late to the arena of leadership, the idea of leader today seems to be stamped with the aura of business success. Thus, a mayor or a president is likely to imagine himself or herself as the CEO of an unruly company in which some of the quasi-employees insist on speaking their minds. The literature on leadership assumes there is a generic concept of leadership. If one knows how to be a leader, one can move smoothly from business to political to educational to religious worlds. This all-embracing concept has a wide-ranging potential readership. Amazon.com on a recent check showed 24,290 books on leadership. It should give one pause that nearly all of these books are written by men. (Is this a temporary lag or is leadership a male idea?). One should note that the great majority of these books come from the United States. The world may need to be led by U.S. (business) men, though scandals of the last few years cast doubt on that assumption.

Books on leadership seem to fit a standard pattern with two parts. The first

part is the autobiography, usually written in a self-deprecating style: **A**w, shucks. I was a poor boy who worked hard, got a few breaks and just mangled to be the greatest (mayor, president, CEO, bishop, general) in recent times. **@**The second part of the book consists of the (3,7,13, 21) rules that I discovered in my triumphant rise to success. The rules are always disarmingly simple - **A**live in the present, **@**Be accountable, **@** so that the reader is likely to say: I could do that.

Undoubtedly there are extraordinary people in the world whose life experience is worth pondering. Often, of course, such people are too busy or too beaten up to have a book on the best seller list. Nelson Mandela's life, for example, might be inspirational to millions of people though I cannot imagine his writing 8 simple rules for living as a prisoner for 27 years. George C. Marshall had an extraordinary career as an army general and then as a far-sighted Secretary of State. On his retirement, he was asked whether he planned to publish his memoirs. He said he did not because it would be unethical to make money from his public service. More recent **A**public servants **@** have not had that problem.

I think one rule that should govern books on leadership is that no author should be allowed to publish more than one. After Jack Welch has told the world about his upbringing and his genius for running GE, the world should be spared the multiple sequels. Donald Trump's latest rehash is *There's No Such Thing as Overexposure*. Many people would beg to differ. If there are 3, 7 or 11 simple rules in the first book, why is there a need for a follow up? Marcus Buckingham seemed to have perfected the genre with his recent title *The One Thing You Need to Know*. It turns out, however, that there is one thing here, one thing there and one thing elsewhere.

Here is the one thing that cuts across nearly all books on leadership today: a leader is not merely a manager. (The one heretic is Peter Drucker who for the last sixty years has been saying that leader and manager are the same). The contrast of leader to manager provides specific qualities to the word leader. A manager, it is said, is concerned with the present and with keeping the system intact; a manager is therefore suspicious of change. A leader by contrast is an idea man, one who has a vision of the future and is interested in shaking up things. Above all, it is said, a leader is concerned with **A**values. **@**People need meaning in their lives and the leader is someone who knows how to provide that.

The distinction between leader and manager is a useful one. A loyal functionary in an organization may get appointed as the leader and it turns out that he does not have a clue as to how to lead. Abraham Beame managed New York City's finances for many years. When finally elected mayor, poor Abe did

not know how to lead the city through difficult times. Rudolph Giuliani wanted to be a leader from his first day in office but not many New Yorkers were ready to follow. He turned out to be a rather good manager of the city's daily operations. With the help of a good police commissioner, he drastically reduced the crime rate. Giuliani seemed destined to leave office as an under appreciated and unloved manager until Sept. 11, 2001 cast him as an unlikely hero. Qualities that had not previously endeared him to the population suddenly were needed for some difficult days and weeks. However, when Giuliani suggested that the city could not get along without his leadership, the applause stopped. If you wish to know what happened on those days in 2001, you can find it in his book *Leadership*, though most of the book is about what is called managing.

The distinction between manager and leader can be helpful, but the distinction should not become a separation. The leadership that Giuliani provided in 2001 remained in close relation to managing the city. The would be leader of an organization needs to have at least a minimum skill at managing. Electing someone mayor or president who has never actually done the daily tasks of managing an organization is a recipe for charlatans. One of the astounding admissions that has come out of the scandals at Enron, Worldcom and the rest is that the leaders did not know what was going on. The claim may seem preposterous but it could be that they are stating the embarrassing truth. Despite receiving millions of dollars to lead the company, they were far removed from managing it. You had a computer on your desk, the prosecutor said to one indicted CEO. Yes, he replied, but it was just for show; I didn't know how to use it. The business details of a political, educational or religious organization should be secondary to its mission; nonetheless, those who claim to lead should not be innocent of the inner workings of the operation.

One sub-group of books which touches on the paradox of leadership refers to the servant leader and servant leadership. The absurdity of this phrase should lead to humor but the language is deadly serious. This category of writing is traceable to a single author, Robert Greenleaf. The idea of servant leader as Greenleaf acknowledged, comes from the bible. The phrase was an immediate hit with Protestant ministers who may have a genuine appreciation of its historical roots and the extreme paradox it represents. But taken over by presidents, CEOs and generals, the idea of being a servant is highly suspicious. Does anyone seriously want to be treated as a servant? Should not the aim be to get rid of servants? Greenleaf moves from servant to serve or service without noting the extreme difference in connotations. That is, to serve or to be of service can be an admirable and necessary role. But a person who serves a customer in a shoe store is not a servant. People ought to serve one another, the

server and the served interchanging their parts according to the situation.

A leader is one who serves - in a powerful role within a community and for a specified length of time. The juxtaposing of leader and servant is on the face of it a self-contradiction. That might be the point, of course, but if so one has to provide an ironic twist to show that the paradox is not a contradiction. Neither Greenleaf nor his disciples dig down into the paradox of power. Other authors on leadership do not have much sense of irony or paradox either but they don't push the term servant leadership which can't just earnestly be put into practice.

The joke that the leader is in on is the fact that what is most often called power is not human power. The people who glory in their possession of power are living in a delusion; the first heart attack may bring them to reality. The very young, the very old and the sick are stubborn reminders that human life is surrounded by dependence. The current movement of women away from a forced dependence may hold the key to whether men as well as women discover the power of interdependence. Throughout the non-human world, power belongs to the dominant force. But among many non-human animals there is the beginning recognition of another way of doing things. That is, conflicts are often worked out through the use of rituals.

The paradox at the heart of human existence is that receptiveness and response is more powerful than simple coercion. The word power has the same root meaning as passive. Human power, in contrast to brute strength or violence, is receptivity that leads to cooperation. Of course, the humans when threatened easily forget their own strength and resort to using force against others. Force is sometimes the best available form of power when resisting a violent person or restraining a child. But force should not be equated with power or thought to be the main form of human power.

The better books on leadership that come from business executives have actually discovered what is in both eastern and western religious traditions. These business leaders discover that people do need meaning (values) in their lives. They need a narrative in which their lives make sense; a few words of praise or comfort can make a big difference. A would be leader who thinks he can put meaning into people's lives is deluded. What he or she might do is provide a setting in which people can listen to one another and find resources within themselves in their relation to others. This is not a new idea. As was written several thousand years ago, When the leader is finished, the people will say we did it ourselves.

WHAT LEADERS DO

By Marcus Buckingham

Every society sees the individual person as having a worth and value that is distinct from the group's. Every society has a word for self-image and an accompanying concept that a positive self-image is better than a negative one. Every society also espouses the not-so-obvious idea that, to a great extent, our self-image is in the hands of other people - all of us pay attention to what other people think of us. Our fear is that they will not look favorably on us or, worse still, that they will not look on us at all, that we will be insignificant in their eyes.

Thus, in every society, we find a craving for prestige and the respect that comes with it. Indeed, throughout history, by far the most effective way to earn the respect of others was to show yourself ready to sacrifice virtually everything for the sake of pure prestige. The fact that different people craved prestige with different levels of intensity meant that some became the masters and others the serfs. The master was he who so craved significance for himself, or for those ideas he deemed worthy, that he was prepared to die in pursuit of the cause. Those who said, "Whatever. Lighten up. I'll do it your way" they were the serfs.

The arrangement of master and serf was, in some sense, a natural state of affairs but it had an unfortunate side effect. It created, in all societies, a shortage of respect. The masters were few but had lots of it, whereas the serfs were many and had none. So, over time, the serf searched for other avenues to get respect, and he found them in religion. Every society ever studied had some form of religion, but most have withered away. The religions that have swept the world, such as Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Hinduism, are successful precisely because they offer a way for people with the least earthly prestige to get respect.

Our need for respect is usually attended by an intermediary, by someone who deals with people one-on-one. In the past this intermediary role was played most often by a representative of the society's religion. Your pastor or your rabbi would meet with you and personally assure you that, although you might be low on the earthly totem pole, by following the precepts of your religion you too had the chance to earn prestige and respect. Today in the world of work, this intermediary role is played by the leader. Each employee has the chance to achieve nobility in his or her role. The great leader, by identifying each person's natural talents and by challenging him to strengthen these talents with discipline, shows each employee how to earn the respect that accompanies excellence. This is why great leaders are so valuable; they provide each of us with many possible avenues to channel our craving for respect.

