

Burn!

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Introduction: Torching the 7 Myths of Leadership

Why is this book for you?

Are you an executive burdened by a grotesquely broad set of leadership expectations? Are you unsure whether to give direction, draw it out of others or just get out of the way? You're not alone. This book burns away the fog to sharpen your vision at work.

Are you a non-management employee with great ideas for new products or services? Do your bosses see themselves as the sole source of new ideas? Are you fed up waiting until you get promoted to show leadership? This book shows you how to lead NOW.

Does your business need to renew itself faster? Are you engaging and retaining employees as well as you could? Are they promoting new ideas as fervently as you want? In this book, you'll learn how thought leadership can get you where you're trying to go.

A revolution for leadership

Do you agree that everyone can show leadership today, that it isn't reserved for those in charge? But what does this mean? If it's nothing but the idea that anyone in a team can take charge informally, what is new? "Informal leadership" has been around for decades. Hying it now is just rearranging the proverbial deck chairs. The same tired old model of leadership is firmly in place if being a leader still means taking charge of a group. A fresh start shows how leadership has nothing to do with managing anyone.

Why so radical? For these reasons:

- Complexity demands leadership from everyone.
- Innovation and continuous improvement are everyone's job.
- Bottom-up leaders advocate new directions. They don't take charge.
- Talent management demands full engagement.
- Leadership is now a guerrilla activity.
- Executives are creaking under too much ownership for results.

The truth is that conventional leadership theory is a bloated mess, but worse, it's the major obstacle to employee engagement and competitive advantage in the 21st century. A radically new beginning is long overdue. In this Introduction, I expose seven leadership myths to be consigned to the flames. Then I state what leadership really means, explain the benefits of the revolution and outline this book's chapters.

Seven leadership myths for burning

1. Leadership entails taking charge of people.
2. Leaders are transformational, managers transactional.
3. Leadership is a set of skills that anybody can develop.
4. Leaders require emotional intelligence and integrity.
5. Managers should be replaced by leaders.
6. Leadership entails working relationships with followers.
7. Great leaders soothe our anxieties.

The myths exposed

1. *Myth: Leadership entails taking charge of people.* The real meaning of leadership is to blast the status quo and advocate new directions, nothing else. How can leadership be shown bottom-up and from the sidelines, if it's about managing a team? Managers, not leaders, manage people. Leadership is not a role. But this doesn't mean that leadership means taking charge informally either. Leadership is not about taking charge at all.
2. *Myth: Leaders are transformational, managers transactional.* Leadership and management are functions, not styles or personality types. Function implies nothing about *how* to move people, so both can be transformational, inspiring, nurturing, caring and empowering. Also, leadership can be quiet, based on hard evidence cited with quiet conviction. It is total nonsense to define leadership so it rules out styles of influence that are not inspirational or transformational.
3. *Myth: Leadership is a set of skills that anybody can develop.* There are two requirements to show leadership – having something worth saying and the courage to say it. Being courageous enough to risk group rejection and ridicule stems from youthful rebelliousness. Courage is neither learned nor a skill. "Leadership development programs" spit out rounded executives, not leaders.
4. *Myth: Leadership demands emotional intelligence and integrity.* Anyone in a responsible position – managers, executives, even lighthouse operators – must be trustworthy. But leadership is like creativity in not being a role, hence not a type of responsibility. As a challenge to the status quo, it can be an aggressive and blunt guerrilla attack on authority from people with zero emotional intelligence as long as they make a strong case with hard evidence.
5. *Myth: Managers should be replaced by leaders.* This gross error dates from the 1980s Japanese onslaught that exposed the West's poor competitiveness. Management was made the scapegoat for being bureaucratic and controlling. But who says it needs to be controlling? Leaders promote new directions. Managers get things done in a way that makes the best use of all resources and they can be as inspiring, supportive and empowering as they need to be. It is time to bring management back from the dead.
6. *Myth: Leadership implies a working relationship with followers.* Leadership can be shown at a distance, by outsiders, long dead leaders and even unintended example. In none of these cases is there a working relationship with followers.

This matters because we turn potential leaders off by telling them they must beef up their relationship skills, or be quiet.

7. *Myth: Leaders soothe our anxieties.* This is the job of executives and managers. Leaders stir up trouble by calling for change and fuelling anxiety. Conventional leadership theory is riddled with paternalism. It is time to change how we view those in charge. We can lean on stronger people in tense times without calling them leaders. They are only substitute parents, doing what our mothers or fathers once did for us.

So, what?

Benefits of a radical remake of leadership theory

- Guerrilla leadership from all employees is critical for organizations to renew themselves faster. To fully engage employees at all levels, they need to see how they can show leadership now.
- Senior executives lack focus. Their role is bloated with too many expectations. Strategy entails focus; leadership slimmed down and management upgraded enables executives to add more value.
- Empowerment has stalled. Employees wait for "leaders" to give direction. Explaining how all employees can show leadership takes empowerment to the next level, exorcising dependency. This is *thought leadership*.
- We live in a world of innovation, a war of ideas. Thought leadership is the knowledge-age replacement for conventional positional leadership. Embrace it and win the next great lever of competitive advantage.
- Leadership is not a learnable skill but it doesn't matter because everyone can show leadership NOW. Every time you persuade someone to do something different, no matter how small the change, you show leadership. Buy this point and you can unleash all the leadership your organization can handle.

How to shift from the old to the new

What do these leadership idols have in common?

1. Martin Luther King
2. Gandhi
3. Nelson Mandela

Not their influencing style. King was an orator, Gandhi rather quiet. They had a vision, but here is what else:

- They attacked the status quo, providing new direction.
- The target audience was their respective governments.
- Crucially, they weren't in charge of the governments they led or even members of them. They didn't manage the people who implemented their visions, so their leadership was bottom-up or from the sidelines.

What emerges from the flames?

- Outsider leadership comes to an end once the target audience changes direction, so leadership can't be defined in terms of getting things done. Leaders sell the tickets for the journey. They do not drive the bus to the destination. This is management's job (the same person may or may not carry out both functions) King, Gandhi and Mandela were not in charge of their governments when they pushed for a new direction. Hence their leadership had nothing to do with managing those groups to implement the changes they championed.
- All notions of leadership based on how best to manage people who formally or informally report to a "leader" are wrong. So-called "leadership style" is really management style.
- Challenging the status quo can be aggressive and confrontational, as it was for King and Mandela, so leadership can't require relationship building skills or emotional intelligence.
- Founding leadership on what happens in groups paints a distorted picture because we focus on what it takes to become the head of a group and what the top person does in that role. We then point to personality or style differences, a total dead end, because many styles are possible. We must start over, and a good way of seeing this is to see how leadership is shown by people *who are totally outside their target groups*.

What is leadership?

Briefly, leadership is an occasional act, like creativity, not a role. You do not need to be creative to lead but you must champion something new. Some leaders have powerful influencing skills, but leadership isn't defined in terms of any influencing style just as our definition of creativity doesn't refer to selling skills. Leadership is an impact on a group that moves it to change direction. It can as easily come from outside the group or bottom-up as from the person in charge of the group.

Leadership does only one thing: it promotes a new direction. It doesn't manage implementation or people. This is the radical twist, necessary to account for leadership from outsiders and bottom-up as well as the traditional top-down variety.

My argument for torching conventional leadership and starting afresh has the following steps:

PART ONE LEADERSHIP REBORN

Part one is a sustained argument for a complete revision of leadership theory. Chapters are best read in order.

1. Chapter 1, *The Leadership of the Outsider*, shows that leadership must be recast as challenging the status quo to provide new directions. Whenever you challenge your boss and promote novel ideas for new products or better ways of doing things, you show thought leadership. Like the outsider leadership of Martin Luther King, Gandhi and Nelson Mandela, such leadership comes to an end once your boss buys your ideas. Management might implement your idea or delegate it to someone other than you. You might have poor management skills or not be interested in managing a team. I explain how thought leadership can be shown by all employees with the courage to promote good ideas to their bosses. This is bottom-up leadership.
2. Chapter 2, *Management Reborn*, brings management back from the dead as a supportive, empowering, facilitative and inspiring function to take the lion's share of moving people from A to B. Conventional leadership theory is fossilized because it is stuck on how people in charge get things done. This leads to the tired old binary oppositions of consideration for people versus providing structure, theory Y versus theory X, democratic versus autocratic, transformational versus transactional. Mysteriously, leadership got associated with the good guy side of these pairs (consideration for people, theory Y, etc.) while management was consigned to the bad guy role. This is a gross error because style questions arise only when we focus on persons in roles instead of functions: leadership to promote new directions and management to implement them. The *means or style* of moving people is a separate question. Hence, managers can be as transformational, empowering and considerate as leaders. The bottom line is that 80 percent of what executives do is management, not leadership.
3. Chapter 3, *The Sharp Edge of Leadership*, shows that leadership equals having something worthwhile to say plus the courage to say it. Leadership strictly focused on challenging the status quo can be displayed across the spectrum of influencing styles from quiet and matter-of-fact through a blunt confrontation to an uplifting, emotionally engaging vision. But, because leadership has nothing to do with managing people, the nature of leadership is much sharper. Out of the fog we now see that courage is the number one personal trait underpinning leadership which, like creativity, isn't a learnable skill. Only influencing skills can be learned. This chapter burns off many popular leadership myths.
4. Chapter 4, *What Executives Do When Not Leading*, explores how executives add value when not leading. If being effective in your role doesn't automatically make you a leader, how else can you contribute? If leadership isn't arc-welded to position, what do executives do? The answer: leadership is only one of several functions that executives perform. A surprising result is that executives show leadership only when change is needed. They run successful businesses without showing much leadership.
5. Chapter 5, *The End of Primitive Leadership*, addresses a highly emotive subject. What is the status of the traditional leader, the person we look up to for strength

in times of crisis to soothe our anxieties and help us reduce uncertainty? This notion of leadership is hopelessly paternalistic because such leaders are substitute father figures. It is also biologically primitive because all higher animals are hard-wired to form into hierarchies. We need to relabel people in charge as executives even if we can't avoid wanting someone strong to lean on or stop living in hierarchies. We will fail to develop a concept of leadership in tune with our need for rampant innovation unless we dump this outworn image.

6. Chapter 6, *Foster Leadership, Develop Executives*, attacks the conventional wisdom that leadership can be developed. I argue that influencing skills can be learned, as can finding something worth saying, but the courage to speak up is not acquired in a classroom or from experience. Like creativity, leadership can only be fostered, not developed. Programs that claim to develop leaders give us rounded executives, not leaders.

PART TWO MORE MYTHS TO TORCH

Part Two covers issues in more depth that were left out of Part One to make it a faster read. Each chapter in Part Two stands alone and can be read in any order.

7. Chapter 7, *Kouzes and Posner on Leadership*, discusses the popular book, *The Leadership Challenge*.¹ There is no place for management in Kouzes and Posner's world because they started writing in the 1980s when management was the scapegoat for U.S. industry's failure to cope with the Japanese onslaught. One of Kouzes and Posner's principles captures the essence of leadership, "challenge the process," but they dilute it to plain water by saying that leaders only stimulate others to challenge the process. Leaders are facilitators for them, what I see as managers. Leadership is at its most bloated in *The Leadership Challenge*.
8. Chapter 8, *Relationships: Women as Leaders*, explodes the truism that you can't be a leader without followers. This innocent idea is mistakenly taken to imply actual working relationships between people. I argue that leadership can be shown at a distance and by long dead leaders; hence there need not be actual working relationships between leaders and followers. Also, people can challenge the status quo aggressively with poor relationship skills. This undermines the claim that women might be better leaders than men by having stronger relationship skills. They might be good managers though, because management does require excellent relationship skills. Now we can explain how people without relationship skills can show leadership in a quiet, factual or obnoxious manner.
9. Chapter 9, *Character and Emotional Intelligence*, argues that such traits are certainly critical for anyone in responsible *positions*. Even a lighthouse operator needs to be trustworthy. But leadership is never a role or position. Having the skills of diplomacy and sensitivity makes you a better influencer, but this is a situational requirement, not a necessary condition, because leadership can be an aggressive, confrontation based on hard facts. The bottom line is that character and

emotional intelligence are essential for the rounded executive or manager but not for leadership.

10. Chapter 10, *Leading, selling, teaching and creating*, looks at the relationship between these factors and the place of creativity. Do leaders teach or sell? What forms of influence count as leadership? Must you be creative or innovative to lead and, if not, what is the place of these elements in leadership? This chapter presents a fine-grained picture of how leadership works by comparing it with factors that are often confused with it.
11. Chapter 11, *Organic or Mechanistic?* is important because the drive to replace mechanistic structures with the organic precisely parallels the push to replace management with leadership for many of the same reasons. I argue that all organizations need to be a mixture of both organic and mechanistic elements. Leadership is organic because it emerges spontaneously from the front-lines or anywhere else inside or outside the organization while management is mechanistic, not in the sense of robotic or mechanical, but by being a role that emphasizes deliberate planned action and consistent output, essential for cost control, uniform quality and predictable service levels.
12. Chapter 12, *Servant Leadership*, shows this to be a confused notion, applicable only in clubs, associations or politics where the person in charge is specifically there to serve group members. Business serves customers and shareholders whose needs can't be sacrificed to employee needs. At best, it might be sensible to talk of servant management, but leadership can upset employees by challenging the status quo. Leaders generate better offerings for customers, not serve employees.
13. Chapter 13, *Leadership With a Postmodern Twist*, paints the big picture to show how leadership radically transformed fits with broader trends, specifically postmodernism, the idea that there is no universal authority on anything. I sever leadership from the authority of position. Good ideas can't be monopolized by one person, unlike a slot in a hierarchy. Everyone can show some leadership by promoting something new. Hence we're all our own authorities. I show how our quest to understand leadership over the past century has failed because of our focus on the *dynamics within groups*. In a postmodern world, group boundaries fragment. We need a vision of leadership that crosses traditional group lines.

This book covers a lot of ground in a short space. I have aimed to make it as easy to digest as possible by keeping the chapters short and to the point. Dividing it into two quite separate parts also helps. Part One sets out my core argument with a minimum of complexity and digression into side issues. Part Two picks up some of the many leadership topics that are left out of Part One.