

THE LEADER IN YOU

ARE LEADERS MADE OR BORN? The question seems to be eternal, yet the answer seems clear. I've never received a birth announcement in the mail, or read one in the newspaper, that announced the birth of a leader. Yet on any given day, we can read the obituaries in any newspaper and see that leaders have died. This simple analysis shows that leaders *must be made*. People can do and learn the skills of leadership. People can become leaders.

In fact, I know that at some level, you already believe this or you wouldn't be holding this book. After all, if you didn't think it was possible to develop your leadership skills—if you thought they were skills people were born with—what would be the point of spending time reading this or any other book on leadership?

We all are born with a unique set of skills and innate abilities. Some of us are born with talents that make us more easily successful as musicians, mathematicians, or mechanics. Others are blessed with talents that make empathy, persuasion, vision, or communication come more easily. We all are given a unique bundle of talents at birth, and it is our job/opportunity to use that personal set of skills and abilities to maximize our potential throughout our life. Some of our unique talents will help us in our journey to becoming a remarkable leader, and other skills may not come as naturally to us, and so we may need to be more diligent or conscious in developing them.

So while leaders are most definitely made, I hope you will agree that within our personal package of potential, we each are given tools that will aid us in our leadership development. There *is* a leader in you. Part of that leader you may already see; other parts may not yet be revealed.

My Goal

This book is designed to help you identify the parts of your personal leadership package working in your favor and help you develop those parts, and any others you wish to work on, to become the leader you are capable of becoming. In other words, my goal is to help you become a remarkable leader by unleashing the leadership potential that is already within you.

A secondary goal of this book, which may not be quite as obvious, is to help you develop leaders around you. Remarkable leaders are those who lead *and* develop others, and this book will help you do that as well.

My Philosophy

When I read a book, I always appreciate knowing the author's perspective and philosophy. Once I learn an author's underlying beliefs, I am in a better position to learn from him or her. I've actually already shared part of that philosophy, but here is some more context.

Our Potential Is Vast

Think about the last time you were in a room of people where a baby was present. Where was most of the focus in the room? On the baby, of course! We all are drawn to babies, like metal to a magnet. We all sense that there is something magical about their presence. However, on a purely logical level, this doesn't make much sense.

Babies cry. Babies smell (really bad) sometimes. Babies are high maintenance. And they aren't attractive by the standards we use to determine physical attractiveness in adults. Yet we are still drawn to them. We want to look at them (or their pictures in their absence). We want to hold them, smile at them, and talk to them in strange voices. Why is this true? Because deep down we know that every baby we hold, every baby we look at, every baby we hear has the chance to be anyone and anything. That baby could be a president of the United States, a Nobel Prize-winning scientist, a best-selling author, a preacher, a teacher, a star athlete—anyone. We know that a baby's potential is limitless.

Because you were once a baby too, that same limitless potential that we know resides in babies still resides in us. Our potential is vast: we are capable of far more than we can ever imagine. This potential exists in all parts of our life, including our potential to be a truly remarkable leader.

We Can Choose

One of the most valuable abilities we all have—something that distinguishes humans from other animals—is the ability to choose. We make choices all day, every day. Many are subconscious and taken for granted, but we can choose how to respond to a situation, what to say, and how to view something. We also have the power to make a choice to learn and grow, or to stay and stagnate.

This book is about helping you use your power of choice wisely to help you become a remarkable leader.

Opportunities Abound

Chances are you are reading this book because you want to become a more effective leader in one part of your life: at work, in your church, in a volunteer organization, or in some other role. Having a focus is a perfect way to approach this book, but you shouldn't limit your view.

The skills of a leader are transferable across all the roles you play in all parts of your life. So while you may read this book through the lenses of your leadership role at work, recognize that you can practice and use those skills in your community, in your church, with your neighbors, and even at home.

We Shouldn't Settle

If you believe, even if only intellectually at this point, that your potential is huge, then it should be easy to see why you shouldn't settle for less than your best. You didn't decide to read this book because you thought you could be a slightly-better-than-mediocre leader. You didn't decide to learn more about leadership skills so you could get by. Deep down you know you can be remarkable. You shouldn't settle for anything less than your best self, reaching ever closer to your potential—whether as a leader or in any other part of your life.

This isn't the time or the place for compromise. Now is the time to take action to become what you are capable of being. This book is about helping you move up your ladder of success, increasing your confidence and competence as a leader—to become remarkable.

What Are the Skills?

Before you read any further, get a mental picture of a person you consider a remarkable leader: a person who personifies leadership to you. This

person can be living or dead, someone you know well or have worked with or someone you have only read about or observed from afar. Once you have that person in your mind, write his or her name below.

My remarkable role model leader:

Now write down five skills, attributes, behaviors, or habits that make this person a model of leadership for you:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

We all have a picture in our mind's eye of what a great leader looks like or of how a great leader behaves. You've just now identified part of your personal picture.

Organizations build these pictures too. They are reinforced through culture and often codified by a list of leadership competencies or leadership behaviors used to describe the traits they value and use to evaluate potential leaders within the organization. Each organization has a different list of competencies. The lists I've seen range from five to twenty-three competencies. In the end, although those skills may be stated somewhat differently, there are some core skills or competencies that usually are included. This book focuses on thirteen of those core competencies:

- Remarkable leaders learn continually.
- Remarkable leaders champion change.
- Remarkable leaders communicate powerfully.
- Remarkable leaders build relationships.
- Remarkable leaders develop others.
- Remarkable leaders focus on customers.
- Remarkable leaders influence with impact.
- Remarkable leaders think and act innovatively.
- Remarkable leaders value collaboration and teamwork.
- Remarkable leaders solve problems and make decisions.

- Remarkable leaders take responsibility and have accountability.
- Remarkable leaders manage projects and processes successfully.
- Remarkable leaders set goals and support goal achievement.

These are the competencies I have identified through experience, consultation, observation, and study as those broad, core competencies that lead to remarkable leaders.

What Makes a Leader Remarkable?

I recently spent time with a Canadian client group that included many hockey fans. I asked them who the greatest hockey player of all time was. After some good-natured teasing and verbal jousting, they agreed that if it wasn't Wayne Gretzky, he was clearly one of the greatest.

I then asked them if he was the greatest skater, the fastest skater, the best defenseman, the best goal tender, or the most physical player ever. On each of these questions, the whole group answered no: they agreed that he was none of these things.

Then I asked if he was the best passer, the best scorer, the best at anticipating where play was going, and the most competitive ever to play the game. These answers were much different from the ones to my first set of questions. Although there wasn't complete consensus on each of these, there was general agreement that Gretzky was the best, or among the very best, in hockey history at these skills.

This led to an interesting discussion about strengths, weaknesses, and greatness. The group determined that it wasn't necessary that the greatest player be the greatest at every individual skill. In fact they generally agreed that there were some skills where Gretzky was far from the best.

If I had asked people to write down what they thought of when asked to think about Gretzky, they would have written down all of his great strengths and not mentioned any of his weaknesses at all.

Think about the outstanding leader you identified a minute ago. When you thought of your role model leader, did you focus on what he isn't good at, or did you remember and marvel at all that she is best at?

I'll bet your results aren't very different from my hockey loving participants.

What makes us remarkable are those skills at which we truly excel. What makes *you* remarkable are those things at which *you* truly excel.

If you have two or more skills at which you truly excel, you will likely be seen by others as highly effective. This is true for a sport, a hobby, or any other endeavor, including leadership.

Of course, if Wayne Gretzky couldn't skate, his other great skills would be all for naught *as a hockey player*. The same is true for us. There are some underlying skills for any pursuit that are absolutely critical: we must have some skill in these competencies even to be in the game.

If you took a person unwilling or unable to learn, with extremely low interpersonal or communication skills, it would be hard to see a remarkable leader because such a flaw (like Gretzky not being able to skate) would overshadow or negate other great skills they possess.

It is a freeing thought to consider, especially after looking at a list of thirteen competencies such as those explored in this book, that anyone can become remarkable by becoming truly outstanding at a few of these rather than needing to become very good or excellent at all thirteen of them.



Remember that what makes you remarkable are those skills at which you truly excel.

Strengthening Strengths Versus Working on Weaknesses

Does all of this excuse us from improving our skills even in areas that aren't already strengths? Of course not! Remember that people at the top of their professions, whether in hockey, horseshoes, or leadership, continue to work on all of their skills, but recognize the importance of their natural gifts.

Before we go any further, get a piece of paper and a pen. Once you have that in front of you, draw a tree. (If you don't have a pen and paper handy, stop and draw the tree in your mind.) Once you have drawn your tree, continue reading.

I don't know whether you drew a palm tree, a tree with leaves, an evergreen tree, or something else, but I do know that about 90 percent of people following that direction will draw only half of a tree: they don't draw any roots (or draw only some just below ground level). In fact, about half of the total plant mass of trees is below the ground's surface. That is, the mass of the root system is as large as the mass of the tree's branches and leaves.

What does this have to do with our strengths and weaknesses? Everything. Just like a tree, most people who want to improve at something focus on only what they can see. And what they can see are their weaknesses. If you want to excel at something, including leadership, you typically are looking for areas where you can improve—that is, the things you see as weaknesses. You may want to be as good at a particular skill

as someone you admire. In this analysis, you forget about the root half of your skills tree—the part that nurtures you and gives you strength and balance and stability.

Have you ever had someone compliment you for something that you thought was easy or that you otherwise took for granted? Did you ever stop to think that the compliment was valid and heartfelt, and that the reason you didn't give that behavior much thought was that it was something that came extremely easy to you?

Those things that we are best at are often the things we take for granted. Just like the roots of a tree, your strongest skills are what allow your tree to grow. The stronger and deeper the roots are, the taller the tree can and will grow.

When given feedback on your performance from a reliable (a person we trust), powerful (our boss), or diverse (through a 360-degree assessment perhaps) source, you will have a list of strengths and weaknesses to consider.

Most people look immediately to the weaknesses to determine what to work on and improve. If you consider our analysis of stars in any field, you quickly realize that it is precisely the strengths that made them stars that make people effective. If this is equally true for all of us (and not just the easily recognizable stars), and I believe that it is, then it makes sense for you to spend at least as much time strengthening your strengths as working on your weaknesses.

There is a growing number of books that explore this concept in far greater detail—*Now, Discover Your Strengths* (2001) by Marcus Buckingham and Donald Clifton is one I recommend—but the concept is important for you to consider as you read this book.

You will read chapters or portions of chapters that you consider or know to be your strengths. It will be to your greatest advantage to consider these chapters at least as strongly as those areas where you know you need to improve.

Before You Go

I close this chapter the way I started it.

You were born with a unique set of skills and innate gifts. In many ways, you have been a leader throughout your life. Regardless of your past experience or success, you have the capacity and the potential to be a remarkable leader.

You are already a leader. Read and use this book, and you can become remarkable.