



What You Really Need to Lead

Robert S. Kaplan

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WHAT MAKES A LEADER? CAN YOU REALLY LEARN TO LEAD? You might believe that leaders are born, not made. Perhaps you think that you need to hold an important job to be a leader--that you need permission to lead. Leadership is one of the most important aspects of our society. Yet there is enormous disagreement and confusion about what leadership means and whether it can really be learned. As Harvard Business School professor Robert Steven Kaplan explains in this powerful new book, leadership qualities are not something you either have or you don't. Leadership is not a destination or a state of being. Leadership is about what you do, rather than who you are, and it starts with an ownership mind-set. For Kaplan, learning to lead involves three key elements: * Thinking like an owner * A willingness to act on your beliefs * A relentless focus on adding value to others Kaplan compellingly argues that great organizations are built around a nucleus of people who think and act with an ownership mind-set. He believes that leadership is not a role reserved only for those blessed with the right attributes or situated in the right positions of power. Leadership is accessible to each of us--today. It requires a process of hard work, willingness to ask questions, and openness to learning. This book aims to demystify leadership and outlines a specific regimen that will empower you to build your leadership skills. Kaplan tells real-life stories from his own experience of working with various types of leaders seeking to improve their effectiveness and make their organizations more successful. He asks probing questions, provides exercises, and suggests concrete follow-up steps that will help you develop your skills, create new habits, and move you toward reaching your unique leadership potential. What You Really Need to Lead will help you develop your capacity to lead by unlocking your power to think and act like an owner.

What You Really Need to Lead Details

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Coenbester says

Reflecting on Leadership

Often we need words of encouragement from a mature person with practical advice. Leadership can become very complicated in our heads. Often because we lost cognizance of the key building blocks. This book reminds us of the power of simple truths about leadership.

Greg Lardy says

Leadership from the perspective of being an owner. Applicable to a wide range of leadership situations.

Christy says

Hands down, the best book on leadership and relationship building I've read. At 170ish pages, it's not overstuffed with fluff (though I did skim from time to time).

It's great because it has specific a definition of leadership and actionable steps to get there. A must read.

Dan says

Your thoughts control who you believe yourself to be. To be a great leader you must begin to think as one. That is the premise of this book and the author does well to support his idea.

H S says

When you are not sure what to do with your life, you need to do some work understanding what you might have a passion for and what's important to you. Start taking a much deeper look at the problems of the world. Take a few months, read more broadly, talk to people, and so on. Start looking outward much more and figure out where you can add value to others.

Be open to learning. Are you willing to say the following phrases?

- I was wrong.
- I made a mistake.
- I've changed my mind.
- I don't know.
- I'm sorry.

-I'd like to ask your advice.

Using these phrases sets a tone that encourages your people to admit mistakes, ask for help, and generally confront issues. This makes it more likely that issues and problems will be raised and addressed in a timely manner.

To be a better leader:

-Know that often, big debates are not usually about a difference of opinion, but about a difference in our understanding of the facts. To address this, lay out the facts of the situation in a five or six page document. Interview all parties concerned to clarify and make sure you have a shared understanding of the facts. Lay out all legitimate disputes in the document so people are able to understand the range of interpretations. Then ask members to read the document in advance and come to a meeting prepared to debate and discuss the issues.

-Learn to ask framing questions. These will cause participants to take a fresh look at the situation or look at it from a slightly different perspective. Requires much thought. (I.e., 30 min of discussion: Why do you work here? What's great about this company? What is your dream for this company? + 30 minutes of discussion: What do you hate about working here? What are we doing that gets us out of alignment and keeps us from achieving your dream for the company? + 30 minutes of discussion: Can you suggest one specific action for how we can deal with these issues and improve our ability to help reach our dream for the firm?)

-Learn to listen! It takes time and effort.

-Use mental models that create an ownership mindset. (If you only had two years to live, what would you do? If you weren't afraid of upsetting the boss, what would you do? If you knew that your efforts wouldn't fail, what would you do? If you assumed you were in charge, what would you do?)

Umakant Jani says

Leadership is A Mindset

This book succeeds in destroying the mind-set that says "Leaders Are Born".

However, the term leadership has become so abstract from Steve Jobs to ones who lead behind the limelight that it hardly can be explained in one book without ignoring the other skills of leaders.

Why to read: "If you dream of being a better leader but have doubt that you're not born as one, then this you should sacrifice your sleep to read this book."

Janka H. says

What makes a leader?

Your effort, dedication and passion. Your self-reflections, knowing yourself and willing to look into the mirror, so to say, to recognize and learn the truth about yourself. Your willingness to learn, again and again; the ability to ask and to listen. The ownership mindset about your life.

This one is a recommended read for anyone who thinks about how to matter in life (not only in business) and wonders if she/he can be a leader. Yes, you can. According to the author, the ability to be a leader is not a

given. And there is no born leader either. One can use their good qualities and to work on their weaknesses - what is important, is the mindset, the ownership mindset - take responsibility. Take "it" (the certain areas as well as your whole life) as you own. Contribute to it accordingly to your gifts, passions and values.

Sounds like a cheap psychology? Well, it might. But the author presents his case believably, with good arguments - and there is no pushing. Instead, there is motivation. The author knows how to get you to think about yourself in the best meaning - know yourself, as you are valuable and the world needs you, your family and friends need you, your business needs you. Take an ownership of it, work with the people around you. Do it in your own way.

And all of this sounds like a positive thinking a bit, but it actually works. At least I was able to recognize some of my blind spots related to work when reading. And this is not always that way.

I am enriched by this book, in ways both big and small.

Dimitar says

Leadership, contrary to what some think and say, is not a matter of whether or not you are "born with it". Robert S. Kaplan explains what it takes to be a great leader in five easy-to-read and coherent chapters with substantiated evidence where he retells past situations that he had been exposed to with his clients (which situations would later turn into success stories for his clients). And if you don't have a notepad to take notes while reading the book, rest assured - Robert S. Kaplan created two appendices that will help you find what you want throughout his book. The only aspect that I did not like about the book is that at times it is a little too repetitive about some concepts especially the concept of ownership, which I occasionally found annoying.

This is a great book on leadership, and I highly recommend it to everyone.

Greg says

The title of the book gives us an impression that there is a single thing that you need to lead. Some people may get enticed to read this book in search of the magic pill for them to properly lead their organizations while others may take this as a precaution and consider this just a fad. However, after reading this book I found that the answer to the question of what you really need to lead is having a mindset of an owner.

Some of you may hear this before: "You have to take ownership of the business", "Think like an owner", etc. While this book tells you to do the same, it does more than that. The book is full of useful information on how to become an effective leader. You will read topics such as building relationship, listening to others, empowering your subordinates, asking for feedback, and many more.

Moreover, the entire book relies on the foundation of the author's experience. He perfectly delivered his experiences among different business persons and how they handle the different issues of leading.

If you ask if this is an easy read, it is. Spending few hours of your time reading this book is worthwhile.

Vorbis says

Picked this up randomly, expecting it to be trite and average - most business books are. It's actually got a surprising amount of useful, usable information.

It's not an area I read often so take my review with a grain of salt. It seems new to me but quite possibly it's not. Regardless, it's well presented and easy to read in a non-patronizing manner. Lots of case histories, it shows how different choices compact on each other, and it stresses the importance of communication.

That would probably be the most useful thing from the whole book. Advice on how to ask for feedback when you are the boss. How to listen effectively and ask better questions, how you should solicit the input of people who are invested in you and your company to help see your blind spots.

And of course the title is meant to be universal to your life - how to own your own actions in all areas of your life. You don't need to wait for permission to do that.

Darren says

Maybe you have got it wrong: leaders are not necessarily born or made by intense schooling. Everybody can possess the potential for leadership and, if this author is correct, you might not need an invitation or permission to lead – you just need to seize it with both hands.

This book sets out to show that leadership is a dynamic state of mind: you need to adjust your way of thinking and your underlying behaviour. You won't probably be the next chief executive of a Fortune 500 company with this book, yet it may encourage you to aim high and broaden your horizons.

It was quite a pleasurable, hype-free and credible read. It might be controversial or heretic to some, it might be over-blown or unrealistic to others, yet if you adopt a middle-of-the-road view it may yield some interesting results. Leadership is something that can and cannot be taught: sure you can teach and refine certain knowledge yet the core, basic, inner feelings of empathy, risk taking, decision making and information processing are held by each and every one of us. We are conditioned to believe that leadership is something that can only be undertaken by a few, the elite or the cream of society.

The author believes that part of the problem is that “leadership” means something different to each of us and there is not necessarily a greater clarity the further up the “business food chain” you go. Some definitions are based on success, whether that is profit, achievement or a measurable quantity such as election to a political post: yet even that can be created by chance, a lucky fluke or the vague decisions of others.

The author is quite direct, writing: “Leadership is about what you do. It is not a position you hold or a state of being. Your leadership potential is certainly shaped by who you are as a person and your life experience, but whether this potential is realized depends on what actions you take.” Yet how are the actions validated? The author underlines that “...effective leadership begins with having the right mind-set; in particular, it begins with having an ownership mind-set. This means a willingness to put oneself in the shoes of a decision maker and think through all of the considerations that the decision maker must factor into his or her thinking and actions. Having an ownership mind-set is essential to developing into an effective leader. By the same token, the absence of an ownership mind-set often explains why certain people with great promise ultimately

fail to reach their leadership potential."

Your brain certainly gets a vigorous workout with this book and the author carefully and considerately advocates a certain position with many examples and descriptions so you can learn where he is coming from. Maybe you won't agree with everything but maybe you will be sold on the author's central arguments. In any case, it will be an interesting intellectual journey that you will surely benefit from.

So seize this book, be prepared to change your opinions and consider what the future may bring!

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<http://syndicate.darrenigram.com/wha...>

Garrett Haynes says

Great book on leadership. Helpful anecdotes of business people he has worked with and the problems he has helped them overcome. Yes, we all have blind spots and we need to be humble enough to ask others to point them out. We need others to help us grow. Good questions at the end of each chapter to work through. I am thinking about my own business and his advice to focus on how we can add value rather than focusing on profitability.

Gavin says

The explanation of a "framing question" on p. 170 really should have been at or near the beginning of the book. Though out the book, the author refers to framing questions and framing in general, as though we all knew what he was talking about, and only explained near the very end of the last chapter what this concept is. The use of this terminology near the beginning would have made the read much less annoying and more beneficial.

Sridhar Guda says

I liked the premise and the narrative of the book. Most books on leadership are preachy...this was well grounded. some tips are pretty useful for leaders. I especially liked the concept of isolation..although asking questions was an old one, it was presented well.

I am however not sure if there can be lessons drawn for leaders at every level in a hierarchy, though claimed. Infact, several cultures have impact on the organisational structure and lessons from this book may not fit everywhere. Also, the book hardly cites examples from all levels of organisation.

Lori Shafer says

Although I often enjoy nonfiction books, business books are not my favorite. That being said, this is an excellent book. Kaplan goes step by step through how to become a leader even when you're not in a leader's

position. His use of case studies to emphasize key points is perfect. Each story further clarifies and give concrete examples of his points.
