

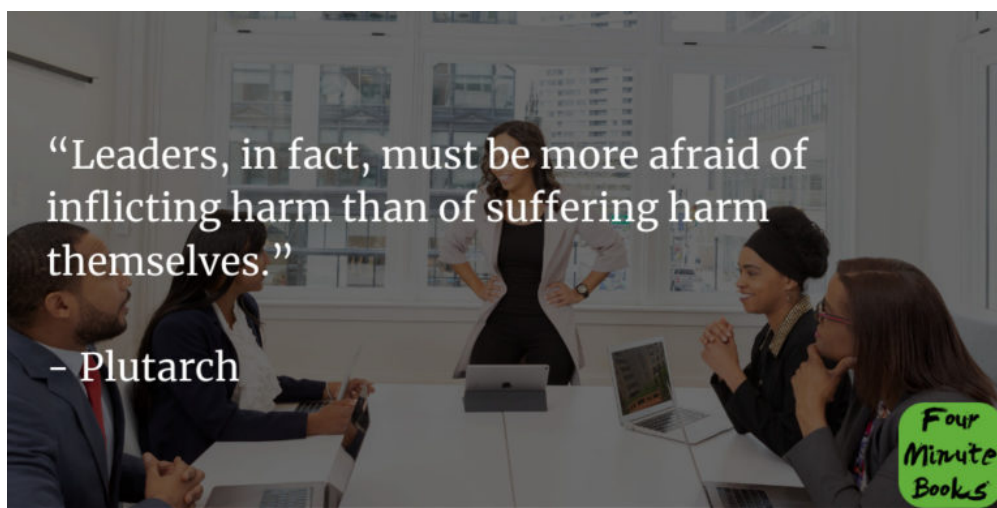
How To Be A Leader Summary

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1-Sentence-Summary: *How To Be A Leader* is Greek philosopher Plutarch's guide to leadership and uses practical ideas, historical narratives, political events, and more to outline the qualities of the best leaders, including serving for the right reasons, speaking persuasively, and following more experienced leaders.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



Ancient Roman essayist Plutarch spent a lot of time thinking deeply about what makes a good leader. He wrote these ideas down in a series of essays that were passed down from one generation to another. Though so much has changed in the two millennia since he wrote his works, surprisingly, the fundamentals of leadership seem to be very much the same.

In *How to Be a Leader: An Ancient Guide to Wise Leadership*, Jeffrey Beneker translates and compiles the best of Plutarch's timeless advice on leadership. Plutarch studied some of the greatest leaders from ancient history including Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and Mark Antony.

Is a young or old leader better? How much should a leader care about their reputation? What are the most important leadership qualities? Plutarch answers all of these questions and more. You will find that his wise counsel is as relevant today as ever.

Here are 3 of the most insightful lessons about leadership from this book

Here's the book summarized in just 3 lessons:

1. A good leader wants to lead for the right reasons.

2. Persuasive speaking skills are a hallmark of leadership.
3. We shouldn't dismiss the strengths of more experienced leaders.

Ready for some age-old advice on leadership? Let's get right into it!

Lesson 1: If you want to be a leader, make sure you have the best intentions first.

Many people aspire to be leaders. The chance to direct others and be an important part of the community seems to appeal to something deep inside most of us. But people don't always want to lead for the *right* reasons.

Some people want to be a leader only because they're tired of taking orders. Other people might just be after the reputation. If you are considering taking on a leadership role, it's important to take a minute to think hard about what motivates you.

Plutarch emphasizes that this decision isn't to be taken lightly. As a leader, you will directly affect the lives of those around you. **According to Plutarch, a good leader is motivated by honor and duty, not by a desire to receive acclaim.**

Why does it matter if someone is after the glory? Because those motivated by glory don't make moderate and rational decisions. Instead, their pursuit of fame drives them to act recklessly. This only introduces instability to the society they are meant to serve.

An example of a Roman leader that Plutarch used to show good leadership with good intention was Cato the Elder. He was a beloved leader, and when the citizens of Rome wanted to erect a statue of him, he told them not to. Cato said he'd rather people ask why they didn't have a statue than why there was a statue.

Cato was much more concerned with the welfare of the people of Rome. He didn't care about his lasting reputation. Plutarch feels all leaders should act this way.

A leader also shouldn't only be looking for fame because they aren't likely to get the applause they are looking for. The truth is, people are far more likely to criticize a leader than praise them, so they are better off if they aren't in that position just to be praised.

Lesson 2: A great leader is exceptionally good at persuasive speaking.

In democratic Athens, an aspiring politician had to win over the people and be elected as their leader. The key to this was to be able to give a great speech.

Athenian statesman Pericles was an example of a leader who was exceptional at both speaking and arguing. When Pericles' good friend Thucydides was asked who was a better wrestler, he said that nobody knew. Thucydides replied that each time he pinned Pericles to

the ground, Pericles would stand and begin to argue he hadn't been pinned at all, and he would convince the audience he was telling the truth.

In Athens, eloquence became the most important advantage in politics. Pericles used this gift throughout his career and convinced his fellow citizens that Athens shouldn't participate in the wars going on throughout Greece. He believed it would be better to avoid war and keep the prosperity and security they had.

Athens stayed in peace throughout his life even though he faced a lot of opposition, thanks to his gift of persuasive speaking. But following his death, everything changed. Athenian politician Nicias also wanted peace but wasn't as gifted in rhetoric as his predecessor had been.

He led a military campaign in Sicily against his will because he couldn't convince Athens to stay neutral. It turned out to be a disaster for Athens. Not only did they lose, but Nicias died fighting when he didn't want to in the first place. Though neither Pericles nor Nicias wanted war, the difference was that Pericles could use his talent of persuasion to convince others to believe his opinion.

Lesson 3: Old leaders have valuable strengths that shouldn't be dismissed.

In an old fable, Aesop tells the story of a fox who had a fur coat full of bloodsucking ticks. A hedgehog offers to remove the ticks from the fox's fur, but she refuses. She says that if the ticks were removed, they'd only be replaced by new, hungrier ticks. Wouldn't it be better to keep the less ravenous ones that had been there for a while?

Plutarch draws a parallel between this fable of the fox and society. If a state removes its older leaders and replaces them with younger, novice ones, it puts society at risk of becoming unstable. Why? Because young leaders are more hungry for things like glory or power, and these ambitions can be bad for society.

Plutarch believes that older leaders possess the valuable wisdom and maturity that society needs. **He argues that they are more mild and moderate in their decisions, making them best-suited to take over in chaotic times.** In the past, ancient cities would bring elderly men out of retirement to run things during a crisis.

Not only that, but an older leader would be the best person to train a younger one on how to take on their new role. Just like you can't drive just by reading about driving, you can't learn how to lead without someone there to show you how.

Plutarch also feels a true leader will want to work as long as they can, rather than retire. In his view, people should continue to practice politics even as they reach old age, because it is more than just a job, it is a way of life. There isn't one end-goal or outcome, but rather it is a

worthwhile process suited for someone of any age.

How To Be A Leader Review

I've always loved leadership books, and *How To Be A Leader* has got to be one of my favorites. It's crazy how well the lessons still apply even considering how old this book is! I think anybody will benefit from this book, no matter how new or experienced they are in life or leadership.

Who would I recommend the How To Be A Leader summary to?

The 33-year-old who just became a manager and is scared they'll mess something up, the 56-year-old executive that wants to be better to their employees, and anyone who wants to lead in any capacity.