



Book The Truth about Leadership

The No-fads, Heart-of-the-Matter Facts You Need to Know

James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner
Jossey-Bass, 2010

Recommendation

This straightforward guide by James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, titans in the executive leadership field, reviews decades of research. The authors distill that research into 10 laws of successful leadership. They write plainly and use examples to convince you that leadership doesn't start with technology or innovation. Instead, you'll learn that leaders need to believe in themselves, build relationships and trust, know their own values, and never stop learning. The book throws in lessons about behaviors you need, attitudes you should cultivate and actions to take as you ascend any leadership mountain. For managers big and small, leaders-in-waiting and anyone interested in the soul of leadership, *BooksInShort* suggests this quick and easy read.

Take-Aways

- Successful leaders “make a difference.” Their work matters.
- Integrity, credibility, trustworthiness and passion form the core of their success.
- Deep values and beliefs make leaders commit to their goals.
- Outstanding leaders focus on the future, creating a vision that unites their teams.
- Leaders must connect with their followers by understanding their motivation.
- Be reliable and trustworthy, speak plainly, and be direct.
- Leaders' responses to hard times, challenges and even failure define them.
- Leaders lead by example through showing, not telling, others what to do and how to act.
- Leaders aren't born, they're made, through self-education and “deliberate practice.”
- Love what you do and why you do it. Follow your heart.

Summary

Distilling Leadership to Its Essence

Changes in economies, technologies and workplaces have transformed the details and “context” of leading. But the essential fundamentals – the systems, actions and attitudes – of leadership remain intact. Supporting data reveal these “10 truths” about leadership:

1. “You Make a Difference”

Leadership starts with a belief that you can do something that matters, like Melissa, a nine-year-old from Nashville, Tennessee. Her concern about the environment prompted her to write a letter to President George H.W. Bush, asking him to fight pollution. She organized her classmates to join the fight by writing letters, recycling and starting a club. Within six months, her letter to Bush had been printed on 250 donated billboards across the United States, her club had gone national and the president's eventual form letter response became irrelevant. Melissa's belief that she could make a difference was all that mattered. What she did – and what you can do – makes a leader.

“You have the potential to lead others to places they have never been before.”

Role models for leaders may emerge from unexpected places. Family members make up most role models, followed by teachers and coaches, not CEOs or executives. Look for role models at home, in the community or down the hall at work. You are the most important leader and role model for those you supervise. Consider using “The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership” as a guide for your behavior. They are: “1) Model the way, 2) Inspire a shared vision, 3) Challenge the process, 4) Enable others to act and 5) Encourage the heart.”

2. “Credibility Is the Foundation of Leadership”

Leadership starts with belief in yourself. It endures because others believe in you. People follow more eagerly, with more enthusiasm and commitment, if their leader proves credible and reliable. Sixty percent of people consistently rate four characteristics as most desirable in their leaders. Leaders should be:

- **“Honest”** – Tell the truth and live by clear ethical beliefs. Be honest with yourself and others about what’s important, and about their strengths and weaknesses.
- **“Forward-looking”** – Provide followers with a future-focused vision. Understand the visions of others and help connect those visions to create success for everyone.
- **“Inspirational”** – Share energy and excitement, and motivate your troops.
- **“Capable”** – Attract trust by getting things done and inspiring confidence in others.

“Leaders are custodians of the future.”

These traits fulfill the “First Law of Leadership: If you don’t believe in the messenger, you won’t believe the message.” Creating belief makes employees work harder and feel happier; their work and happiness affects customers and investors in turn. Understanding the importance of credibility leads to the “Second Law of Leadership: Do What You Say You Do.”

3. “Values Drive Commitment”

Your potential followers need to know and understand you to figure out why they should follow you. So, you must fully know yourself. The “power of personal values clarity” is a compass for life’s daily, difficult decisions. Consider events that shaped you, beliefs that guide you and values that define you. Discover your voice and your objectives by naming your top five values. Delve into how your beliefs and goals mesh with the beliefs and goals of others. Your values inform the authoritative decisions and bold steps you take toward your aims. For success, that grants fulfillment, your personal ambitions must align with those of your organization. You must have commitment, because pursuing any goal means sacrificing the time, energy and trade-offs required to achieve it.

4. “Focusing on the Future Sets Leaders Apart”

Leaders make dreams come true by having a vision and looking to the future. They see beyond today’s stack of papers or tomorrow’s deadlines. As a leader, you need this vision and you must share it with your co-workers. Achieving the dream is more likely if everyone shares it. This ability to look toward the future ranks second after honesty on the list of qualities people want in leaders they would “willingly” follow. Relatively few people value this quality in their co-workers, but on average 70% of survey respondents seek it in their leaders.

“Before you can effectively lead others, you have to understand who you are, where you come from and the values that guide you.”

Try to find more time to think about the future. That includes inspiring others to keep focused and excited about where you’re going together. Studies show that most high-level leaders spend only 3% of their time on the future, which is not enough. Invest quality time in crafting your organization’s vision for tomorrow. Start by referring to your past. Think about frequent concerns, subjects and themes of your life. Imagine future opportunities related to those recurring or constant threads. Consider establishing a “futures research committee,” a team to track publications that consider trends in your field. Have them share what they learn, and use these ideas to improve your forward-looking skills. Always continue to hope. Don’t look at economic predictions, for example, and think your company is doomed. Turn that information to your advantage. Find the uncommon solution which leads the way around or through an issue and puts your company on the road to survival.

5. “You Can’t Do It Alone”

The first four truths aren’t really about you. They’re about your primary job as a leader, which is to serve others. You will accomplish nothing extraordinary alone because leadership never concerns a single person. It’s about the relationship between a leader and his or her followers. The bond of mutual connection creates an environment for accomplishing great things. “Leading others is definitely not about getting others to conform to your point of view.”

“Leadership is not preordained. It is not a gene, and it is not a trait.”

Hiring leaders with great experience and high IQs can prove a recipe for failure, unless those leaders have the emotional ability – the social and interpersonal skills – to build connections, understand people, and create bonds. Leaders must excel at listening. Understanding your followers’ perspective comes from spending time with them, developing relationships and creating intimacy. Only after that investment of time can you reap the return: bonding everyone around a universal image of the future, providing you can speak in a way that motivates and engages. You want to move people to care as much as you do, so they can see how your goals feed their souls and needs. Achieving this will be easier if you pay attention to your followers’ wants and desires. Listen to them. Provide support. Help them learn new things. Be the uniting, connecting force in their work lives. Encourage them to be better and to believe, and they will.

6. “Trust Rules”

Trust is everything, from credibility and accomplishment to innovation, success, and team unity. Without trust, you won’t have anything else. Trust dictates how much influence people will accept from you. More trust equals better results and higher motivation from your followers. To build trust, start from the foundation. Generate a cycle of trust, show that you believe in your employees and believe that they’ll do the right thing. Earn their trust by doing your job well and looking out for your followers. Be reliable, direct and open; speak plainly and keep your promises. Telling the truth isn’t enough. You also must never hold back information. Withholding or

delaying discovery erodes trust. Share what you know when people need to know it. Consultants in the United Kingdom found that 90% of employees in the know want to work longer and harder, but that 80% of employees kept in the dark feel the opposite. Clear communication is a bedrock of trust.

7. “Challenge Is the Crucible for Greatness”

Leaders don’t become role models by leading people down easy street. They earn accolades by leading through adversity, excelling in tough times, reinventing failing industries, inventing new products or otherwise overcoming challenges. Adversity creates the right environment for stellar leadership.

“Leaders see open doors while others see brick walls.”

Hard times are an opportunity. Challenges, whether great or small, teach you what’s important to you and how badly you want it. Leaders see tough circumstances as a chance to make a difference, and they do not turn away. Your determination, focus and “grit” empower you to reach difficult goals, especially if you’re truly committed. Successful leaders share a common passion for their cause, which fuels a willingness to struggle through the necessary work. Always remember that failure invariably teaches you something about yourself.

8. “You Either Lead by Example or You Don’t Lead at All”

Being a leader requires modeling the right actions and attitudes every day. Your performance shows others how to feel, think and act. This is how you earn your credibility, how you live out the essence of “Do What You Say You Will Do.” Your correct behavior provides powerful proof that you aren’t asking followers to do anything you aren’t doing along with them. Journalist Alan Deutschman, in his book *Walk the Talk*, explains that leaders really work with just two tools: their words and their actions. “When you give your word that you’ll do something, and then you follow through on your commitments, it has a powerful effect on people.”

“Love is the soul of leadership.”

People watch you carefully. When your actions line up with your words, you prove your integrity and guides others. Setting an example and taking the first step aren’t easy, whether that means working more cooperatively with other departments or following through on commitments. Keep your promises and admit your mistakes. Apologize when your missteps cause other people problems. This lets them know you understand the impact of your actions and helps restore your credibility. Watch others to see if the steps you take are sufficient so you can remain accountable. Seek feedback and accept it openly as a path for growth.

9. “The Best Leaders Are the Best Learners”

Leadership isn’t an inherent characteristic that a chosen few receive at birth and everyone else lacks. Successful leaders become successful by learning and practicing the requisite skills. Leadership requires hard work and constant enthusiastic learning. Venture out of your comfort zone to learn in new ways, and try to soak up knowledge from any source. Believe that you can learn anything if you work hard enough, because you can. This mind-set will serve you well, and it teaches you that you can learn to lead. Use “deliberate practice” to improve your skills. That means following through on that which is repetitive and challenging and not necessarily enjoyable. Build in regular feedback. That kind of practice will improve your leadership abilities.

10. “Leadership Is an Affair of the Heart”

Despite myths that working without emotion is best for business, successful leaders live and work passionately. Open and caring managers rank as the highest performers. They’re affectionate, concerned and optimistic. Athletes who go above and beyond, and succeed despite the odds, are often described as having “heart.” Good leaders have that kind of fervor and love for what they do. Zeal for the organization, the purpose and the people on the job defines top leaders.

“You don’t have to look up for leadership. You don’t have to look out for leadership. You only have to look inward.”

Leaders run on love. They keep going through tough times, make brave decisions and stay strong because of love. And leaders must demonstrate love. As in any relationship, offering love brings love in return. Pay attention to your followers. Come to know and understand them, listen to them and learn from them. Acknowledge their work. Recognize them with thank-you gestures big or small. Tell stories about their successes and contributions. Spend time with your followers, informally and while hard at work. Finally, love your own work as a leader – not the rewards but the actual work – and you’ll naturally produce the positive energy to sustain and motivate everyone around you. “Leadership is not about who you are or where you come from. It’s about what you do.”

About the Authors

James M. Kouzes and **Barry Z. Posner**, business professors at California’s Santa Clara University, are a top executive educational team. Their other works include bestsellers *The Leadership Challenge*, *A Leader’s Legacy*, *Encouraging the Heart* and *The Leadership Challenge Workbook*.
