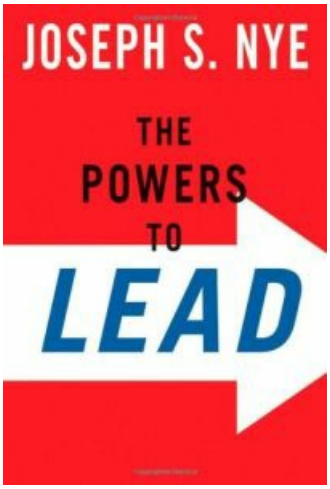

Book The Powers to Lead

Joseph Nye Jr.
Oxford UP, 2008
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Recommendation

Author, statesman, university dean and agency director Joseph S. Nye Jr. has led – and has closely observed leadership – from the highest levels. His earlier writings forged the theory of "soft power" to denote persuasive leadership. In this book, Nye traces leadership lessons from Sun-Tzu to George W. Bush, citing historical events and their impact over the span of centuries. He defines which qualities mark successful and failed leaders. Nye's writing style is dense, and almost every sentence is a thesis. You may find yourself holding a page open with a fingertip as you gaze up from the book, digesting all that Nye conveys and applying his illustrative lessons to whatever dilemmas you might face as a leader or a follower. And to Nye – as he makes clear – everyone is usually both. *BooksInShort* recommends Nye's compelling insights to CEOs, executives and managers who want to become more effective leaders, to anyone who aspires to lead, and to everyone who needs to learn the art of following.

Take-Aways

- Your leadership success depends on your ability to guide and motivate others.
- Leadership involves those who lead, those who follow and their specific "context."
- Effective leaders combine the use of "hard power" – which is commanding – and "soft power" – which is persuasive – as circumstances dictate, to achieve "smart power."
- Not every hero should lead, and few leaders prove heroic all the time.
- Both luck and charisma are critical components in the makeup of good leaders, and these traits attract followers.
- Successful leadership means convincing others that what you would like them to do just happens to be what they intended to do anyway.
- Having a worthy idea does not mean people will automatically respond to it.
- Different situations call for different kinds of power. Leadership is always about context, about recognizing the situation and acting accordingly.
- Some leaders see a crisis as an opportunity to exercise power with fewer restraints.
- The "democratization" of information is creating a profound change in leadership styles.

Summary

Leadership in History

Leadership means getting others to do what you want. And that requires shaping a group's activities and goals. It is not about having the best idea and waiting for others to recognize it. Leaders lead because they possess a kind of power. The leadership strategist Machiavelli believed a leader who is feared – a form of "hard power" – is more effective and certain to rule longer than a leader who is loved – a form of "soft power." But, as Machiavelli counseled, wise leaders foment both emotions in their followers. Machiavelli also cited two other crucial aspects of leadership: It always depends on "context," and it always concerns an ever-changing relationship among leaders, followers and situations.

"The context of leadership is changing and many of today's leaders have not caught up with it."

In ancient times, people regarded the hero-warrior, such as Hector or Achilles from *The Iliad*, as the ideal leader. Modern hero-warriors include Dwight D. Eisenhower, who was first a general and then a president. However, even without extensive military service Franklin D. Roosevelt proved a worthy, respected president and leader. By overcoming his physical limitations – Roosevelt suffered from polio – he demonstrated a different kind of heroism to Americans, and they responded with loyalty.

"If I can attract you to want to do what I want you to do, then I do not have to force you to do what you do not want to do."

However, heroes – who by their nature are supposed to be perfect – seldom make the best leaders, and not every leader needs or proves to be heroic. Heroes seek to solve every problem by action, so heroism often depends on impetuosity. But knowing when to be patient is a great leadership virtue. The ancient Chinese military strategist Sun-Tzu felt that fighting battles only proved that other strategies, such as politics, had failed. Sun-Tzu rejected the idea of heroic confrontation in favor of collaborative leadership methods.

Leadership, Luck and Charisma

Successful leaders are lucky. No one becomes a leader without luck, and followers are more likely to remain loyal if they perceive that their leaders have fortune on their side. Aware leaders make their own breaks by recognizing opportunities to maximize leadership and by avoiding the pitfalls that undermine authority. The nature of their situation, which few leaders can control, entirely determines which opportunities and pitfalls emerge. But leaders can control how they respond to circumstances. Effective leadership adapts, surfing on events as if they were waves.

"It is not a manly modern Achilles or the strongest alpha male who makes the best warrior leader in today's communication age."

Good fortune contributes to charisma, and few leaders maintain their position without it. The word charisma has been devalued somewhat, and today it suggests only a readily accessible "personal magnetism." But real charisma depends on a mutually seductive, continual interaction between a leader and a body of followers. Rather than being entirely a personal quality of leaders, it is an elusive transaction between leaders and followers. Bill Clinton was charismatic; he could often persuade those who disagreed with him to do his bidding. And even if he could not, people still liked him personally.

"Hard power rests on inducements (carrots) and threats (sticks)."

Charisma is a crucial form of soft power, which persuades, cajoles and compromises. Good-looking people often get others to do as they want just by asking, because personal attraction is a form of soft power. Soft power – or "feminine" leadership – is never violent or bullying. Those who lack charisma often turn to hard power – "masculine" leadership – which is coercive, threatening, dictatorial and, at times, violent. "Smart power" results from the judicious use of both soft and hard power. Soft power can accomplish a great deal, even in wartime, when strategic alliances matter just as much as military strength. Bombing an enemy city to ashes, however, is not leadership, just as forcing submission is not the same as attracting followers. Leadership means convincing others that what you would like them to do just happens to be what they intended to do anyway.

"[Soft power]... is the ability to entice and attract."

No one ever won a war without hard power. The ideal leader combines hard and soft power, and knows when to use which one. Lyndon B. Johnson came to understand the subtle diplomacy of soft power as a legislator pushing for civil rights laws, but he also used the effective intimidation of hard power as president. Neither method is more effective or morally superior. Those with superior force might default to hard power; those without it will first try soft power. Different situations call for different kinds of power. Leadership is about context, about recognizing the situation and acting accordingly.

Good Leadership

Being a "good leader" means being both principled and effectual. "Ethical" or moral leaders who accomplish little prove of little value to anyone; unprincipled leaders plant the seeds of their own downfall with each corrupt action. Good leaders follow a moral code that proves effective in facing real-world dilemmas (rather than just in philosophical debates) and they impart that code to their followers, who in turn communicate their reactions to that code back to their leaders. Anyone following moral principles as a guideline for action or policy, as Gandhi or Martin Luther King did, must learn to balance morality with pragmatism. Followers, who are unlikely to be as principled as their leaders, still are quick to condemn any action they regard as a moral betrayal.

"A leader is best when people barely know he exists, not so good when people obey and acclaim him; worst when they despise him." (Lao Tzu)

One example of how leadership depends on principle and context is the way public perception of King's nonviolent, conciliatory ways changed over time, even among his followers. Some in the civil rights movement came to regard his methods – so successful for several years – as old-fashioned and even disloyal, particularly as civil rights politics moved into more confrontational arenas. King's charisma never diminished, but in the end it was not enough to overcome skepticism among those who admired him, but doubted his effectiveness.

"Globalization simply means networks of interdependence at intercontinental distances, and it is as old as human history."

Ethical leaders must attend to "goals, means and consequences." What do they seek to achieve? What effective tools can they employ without compromising their moral standards? What methods must leaders forego because using them would violate those standards (and their followers' ideals)? And, finally, what outcomes might result from the ways leaders choose to fulfill their goals? When considering consequences, leaders must think beyond achieving an objective to recognizing how the way they achieve it will affect their followers' loyalty.

Crisis Leadership

Some leaders appreciate a crisis because "it relaxes the normal constraints that limit their power and action." A crisis is defined by "a threat to key values and a premium on a timely response." A crisis could be military, such as the Cuban Missile Crisis, or civil, such as Hurricane Katrina. A crisis can contain elements of both, such as the attacks on September 11, 2001. Crises demand a different set of skills than day-to-day leadership. Crucial qualities for crisis leadership include following previously structured, prepared strategic plans, remaining calm, and communicating that calm to followers, who will be relieved by their leader's sense of order in the midst of chaos.

> "Nothing is more important than citizens having the tools to assess and judge their leaders, whether past or present, public or private."

Some crises are "routine" and some are "novel." A small California earthquake or a low-level Florida hurricane fall within expected norms, and standard responses can usually deal with them. But Hurricane Katrina and 9/11 were, to say the least, novel crises. A novel crisis demands flexibility. Some argue that those leaders who responded to the World Trade Center fires on 9/11 as if they constituted a routine crisis doomed a number of New York City firefighters. Novel crises demand a quieter, more collaborative leadership style, one that puts aside authority for greater cooperation with those who have expertise in issues unique to each crisis. New York City's then-Mayor Rudolph Giuliani demonstrated superb novel crisis leadership in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. He remained calm, solicited bipartisan opinions and listened to experts.

> "Charisma grows out of the relationship between the leader and his or her followers and is not just an individual trait of the leader."

George W. Bush's administration expertly exploited the crisis mentality after 9/11. He used the crisis to pursue more presidential power and to gain support for his invasion of Iraq. America's sense of crisis enabled Bush to enact a number of policies that voters might have strenuously resisted in a different political climate.

"Autocratic" and "Democratic" Leadership

Leadership always depends on context, on situation and on the relationship between the leader and the led. In addition to routine and crisis leadership modes, some situations require either autocratic or democratic responses. Much of Churchill's governing style during World War II was autocratic – he issued decrees because time and necessity provided little opportunity for collaborative consultation. Microsoft's Bill Gates and Apple's Steve Jobs, while the were willing to listen to their main advisers, lead in an autocratic manner.

> "Heroes lack blemish, but leaders have warts."

A democratic or "consultative" style of leadership, wherein a leader confers with a broad-based sample of subordinates, requires more time to reach decisions. However, this method allows leaders to accrue more data, "create buy-in" and grant power to their followers. Abraham Lincoln proved a model of consultative power: He appointed his fiercest political enemies to high cabinet positions and listened to contrary views before making decisions. Conversely, George W. Bush's White House excluded anyone who did not toe the predetermined policy line and made decisions based on an in-group consensus. Leaders who isolate themselves in that way – a manner associated with totalitarian regimes – often make choices that are not grounded in reality. Their detachment distorts their understanding.

Leadership and the "Democratization" of Information

More information is available today than at any time in history. Such accessibility creates increasing difficulty for leaders who seek to hoard information, whether the leaders are presidents, CEOs, teachers or branch managers. The democratization of information is helping to create a profound, perhaps permanent shift in hierarchies and thus in modes of leadership. Organizations are moving from a "command to co-optive style." Networks, characterized by equality of power and information access, are replacing up-down command structures. Network leaders have to consult with their followers because the followers expect no less and would not respond to autocratic demands. Networks produce a sense of entitlement in users, who call on their leaders to demonstrate superior skills or knowledge. The possession of a formal leadership title brings with it no prescribed power; only followers can grant that power.

Judgment in Leadership

In this new paradigm, leaders must be willing to engage in "reality testing," which means checking their leadership hypotheses against real-world conditions. Modern leaders must accept change as the new status quo and be willing to respond and adjust to shifting conditions and contexts. Regardless of input, at some point every leader must trust his or her judgment above all.

> "Holding a formal leadership position is like having a fishing license; it does not guarantee that you will catch any fish."

A high IQ is good for some tasks, but the best leaders are not always the most intelligent. "Emotional intelligence" often matters more than mere smarts; it includes "the self-mastery, discipline and empathic capacity" that fuels any leader's quest and draws followers. Emotional intelligence manifests in self-control and the ability to reach out to others. It means being able to harness one's charisma, learning when to utilize it and when to tone it down. People always observe their leaders, and followers are always taking cues. Emotionally intelligent leaders know how their words or actions will affect their followers and adapt according to the situation.

> "I sit here all day trying to persuade people to do the things they ought to have sense enough to do without my persuading them." (President Harry S. Truman)

"Acting and leadership" have much in common, as Ronald Reagan demonstrated to great effectiveness. Leadership also involves knowing how to communicate by using symbols. English World War I guerrilla leader and author T. E. Lawrence ("Lawrence of Arabia") had a fine understanding of symbolic communication. To "dramatize the Arab cause," he wore Bedouin robes to the Paris Peace Conference following the war, shocking his compatriots who were all wearing their European suits. But later, during meetings in Cairo to establish future national borders, Lawrence wore his full-dress British Army uniform with all his hard-earned decorations, the better to emphasize the power of the government he represented. The former is a superb example of soft power while the latter solidly demonstrates hard power, and both incarnate the strategic gifts that spring from a leader's emotional intelligence.

About the Author

The former dean of Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, **Joseph S. Nye Jr.** is currently a professor at Harvard and the author of *The Paradox of American Power.*