

LEADERSHIP A to Z

A GUIDE FOR THE APPROPRIATELY AMBITIOUS

JAMES O'TOOLE

Book Leadership A to Z

A Guide for the Appropriately Ambitious

James O Toole
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Recommendation

This simple but effective book is written for a general audience with interest in managerial, supervisory and leadership concepts. The book is structured as a dictionary of terms relating to leadership. While some readers may like the A-B-C division of information, others may find the book somewhat disjointed, as the format forces you to skip around from idea to idea. But then, as author James O'Toole points out, readers are invited to seek the nuggets that appeal to them, letter by letter. The connective tissue that O'Toole lays between the entries is ambition, which he says is the single pre-requisite to leadership and the one common characteristic that all great leaders share. *BooksInShort* recommends this accessible summary of basic leadership principles, although hardcore readers of leadership literature might be better off elsewhere.

Take-Aways

- All leaders have ambition.
- To be an effective leader, you must truly want to lead.
- Organizational success depends on cascading leadership through the organization.
- Leadership often is misused due to arrogance and ego.
- Leaders balance the creation of a common vision and guiding necessary change.
- A leader must be committed to basic values and philosophies of leadership.
- Leaders spend about half of their time communicating and the other half developing other people to do their jobs and exercise leadership.
- Good leaders transcend differences by uniting people around a common goal.
- The growing complexity corporations generated the trend toward joint leadership.
- A leader's biggest accomplishment is creating conditions that allow others to achieve their aspirations.

Summary

The Leadership Prerequisite: Ambition

The basic character trait that all leaders must possess is ambition. To be a leader, you must truly want to lead and be committed to your task, much as Gandhi dedicated his life and risked everything to bring independence to India. To be successful, leaders need to feel compelled to help their organization and willing to do what it takes to attain that goal. For instance, when Jack Welch took over GE, he wasn't satisfied with the company's high profits, blue-chip performance on Wall Street and national respect. He wanted to make GE the "world's most competitive company," so he took GE to a higher level of performance.

"I believe only one inherent character trait is essential for effective leadership, and that is ambition."

To understand leaders, look at what leaders do. Information about a leader's personality types, styles, and individual traits isn't very useful because every leader is different and leadership is not a "solo act." Rather, an organization's success depends on having leadership ability throughout the organization - not just in a single leader. A leader's most productive act is to "cascade leadership" down and throughout the organization, to create a community of leaders at all levels.

The ABC's of Leadership

The ABC's of leadership are a mix of qualities, traits and personalities. They include things leaders do, qualities they need and major issues they confront. The list, with a few samples, includes:

- **ABB's Bench strength** - Being a leader of leaders is critical to your success, as illustrated by the ABB Company, which has 200,000 global employees. Ideally, you should create deep reservoirs of leadership bench strength that your organization can draw upon at all times. You don't want yes-men and yes-women to carry out your will. Rather, you need effective disciples who become true leaders in their own right, so they think for themselves.
At ABB, Percy Barvenvik created an environment as CEO that was designed to develop leaders at all levels who shared his vision and who could create more leaders to spread his example of delegating decisions and authority. When you force people to make their own decisions, you hold them accountable and you show leadership.
- **ABC's of Business Success** - As a leader, you need to focus your follower's efforts on the basics of business success, which include producing quality products, listening to customers and doing the right thing. When Richard Teerlink took over the Harley-Davidson motorcycle company in 1989, the brand was nearly defunct. He revised it by getting employees to pay attention to what bikers wanted - high performance, the mystique of easy-rider freedom and responsive employees.
- **Apologia** - Unfortunately, leadership has gained a bad name in many places due to its misuse. Dictators have engaged in misrule in many countries and organizations, including Frank Lorenzo at Continental and Roger Smith at General Motors. But many positive leaders, like Indira Gandhi, show that leadership must focus efforts toward a common goal. Without this focus, organizations can't achieve their goals.
- **Brownian motivation** - This is the principle, illustrated by Tina Brown of The New Yorker, of challenging people so you bring out the best in them. Inspire your followers to show them how good they can possibly be. Help them achieve these elevated aspirations. When Brown headed The New Yorker magazine, she went into the trenches with her staff members, questioning and challenging their assumptions. She asked them to clarify and defend their ideas. She also coached them. The result was a transformed New Yorker that expanded its circulation.
- **Cascading leadership** - Imagine a chart with leaders on the top. They create vision, values and conditions conducive to change, and also reward appropriate behaviors. They create disciples who encourage others to lead change, build capabilities and translate their vision into concrete behaviors. Continual renewal results from spreading leadership through the organization.
- **Change** - As a leader, you have to balance two essential tasks: one is aligning everyone in the organization behind your vision; the other is guiding appropriate and necessary change. When you align people, you create coherence between planning, budgeting, measurement and rewards. This coherence contributes to success, because everyone is working toward a common end. But if you focus only on alignment, the organization can soon become too rigid and eventually become extinct. As a result, you need to prepare your organization for "continuous renewal."

You must combine the stability of an aligned organization with the flexibility of adaptive organization. At the same time, you need to be ready to change what you do as a leader, too. A good way to do this is by learning how to ask questions and really

- listen to the answers. Additionally, involve others in the decisions that affect them; think and say "we" instead of "I", credit others for their contributions and truly respect others, even when they disagree with you.
- **Commitment** - Be committed to your values, principles, and philosophies of leadership. As Margaret Thatcher of Britain said, you can change one's tactics, strategies and programs in response to changing situations, but never change your principles.
- **Communication** - Leaders spend about half their time communicating and the other half developing people. Repeatedly tell others about your company's vision, strategy, goals, objectives, values, mission, purpose and principles. Help everyone in the organization understand what work to do and why his or her role matters.
- **Delegation** - You can't hope to manage the behavior of every employee. Rather, your task should be creating the conditions in which they will do what is appropriate. That's what Ken Macke, CEO of the Dayton Hudson Corporation in the 1980s, did when he practiced leadership by example to encourage employees to "do right by customers". He practiced leadership by walking around and spent time nurturing successors and creating the structures, systems and attitudes that remained in place even after he retired.
- **Ego** - The dark side of leadership comes when leaders display arrogance or ego, such as that exhibited by former Washington, D.C. mayor, Marion Barry. Even some very good business leaders like Jack Welch and Michael Eisner can behave arrogantly by acting as if their company success was due to "their show" alone.
Don't get caught up in self-promotion, self-glorification or self-indulgence. It is healthy to have appropriate ambition directed toward achieving the goals of your organization and helping your followers realize their needs.
- **Focus** - Disagreements about goals and competition between self-interests and values are common characteristics of all organizations. To be a good leader, recognize the major differences that exist among your followers and appreciate legitimate differences, while simultaneously transcending them by showing everyone a common desirable goal.
In this way you create common ground, so you unite the diverse interests of your followers. Then, keep everyone focused on this shared territory, and continually remind everyone about this common objective and why it is so important to achieve it. Tightly channel everyone's energy and effort to this common goal.
- **Joint Leadership** - Since the 1970s, there has been a growing trend of joint leaders heading up corporations. A good example of this is when oilman Robert O. Anderson and the scholarly Thornton Bradshaw joined together to lead Atlantic Richfield through a decade of high growth. The two leaders need to be able to trust each other, as well as split up the responsibilities, plan in advance about strategy, and keep each other informed. This trend reflects the increasing complexity of leading a corporation today.
- **Needs of Followers** - To be a good leader, you need to be a good listener so you can learn what your followers want. Then, create a "new, transcendent vision" that encompasses this wide variety of needs based on working together for the common good.
- **Resources** - Your three basic challenges as a leader are 1) establishing and communicating the organization's vision, strategy and objectives, 2) rewarding people for their efforts to realize these aims and 3) removing the obstacles that keep people from doing needed work. As a leader, you want to make sure people have sufficient, appropriate resources to do their jobs.
- **Zenith** - The biggest accomplishment you can make as a leader is to create the conditions that allow your followers to achieve their aspirations. However, often followers don't recognize or thank their leaders for helping them. Thus, your highest reward comes from self-fulfillment, especially when people say, "We did this ourselves."

“While leaders don't do much, the alignment of strategy, structure and processes is one leadership task that cannot be delegated.”

The Best of the Rest of the Leadership Alphabet:

- Coherence, Comparative Advantage, Contradictions, Controlling.
- Denial, Details, Differences, "Chainsaw" Al Dunlap.
- Early Wins, Effectiveness, Energy, Engaging the Middle.
- Fellowship.
- Generosity, Getting Started, Globalism, Grandstanding, "Guvmint" Work.
- Hanging, Hierarchy, Hope, How Not to Create Followers.
- Inequality, Intelligence, Integration, Institutionalization.
- KISS, Knowing When to Leave.
- Listening.
- Metrics II (Evaluating Individual Leadership).

- Obsession.
- Paradoxes, Peoplesoft, Perfection, Performance, Perks, Perspectives, Power.
- Questions.
- Repetition, Repetition, Repetition.
- Second Acts, SHITMS, Sound Bites, Symbolism.
- Teaching, Team, Theories of Leadership, Tomorrow's Leaders, Tough Guys.
- Up and Out (and Sideways).
- Vision.
- What Leaders Do, Why Leaders Won't Lead.
- X-Factor.
- You - The Leader.

About the Author

James O'Toole is a Research Professor in the Center for Effective Organizations at the University of California and Chairman of the Board of Academic Advisors to Booz-Allen and Hamilton's Strategic Leadership Center. He is the author of *Leading Change*.
