The Importance of Leadership: Setting the Stage

ALL OVER THE WORLD in corporations and government agencies, there are millions of executives who imagine their place on the organization chart has given them a body of followers. And of course it hasn’t. It has given them subordinates. Whether the subordinates become followers depends on whether the executives act like leaders.

—John Gardner

Learning Objectives

After studying Chapter One, you will be able to:

• Define leadership and discuss its importance.
• Know where leaders learn to lead and what people want in a leader.
• Identify the satisfactions and frustrations of leadership.
• Describe the elements of caring leadership.

Leadership is a concept that is both current and timeless. In one form or another, the leadership process has been central to human interaction since the dawn of society. Excellence in leadership requires the ability to attract capable people, motivate them to put forth their best efforts, and solve problems that arise. These are difficult tasks, which help explain why effective leadership is rare and why we respect those who excel.

To personalize the subject, consider these questions: Have you ever been the victim of a poor leader? How do you feel about the good leaders you have known? If you have experienced both types of leaders, you know firsthand the importance of good leadership. No other factor is more important for work morale and job performance.

There are millions of people who know what it is like to work for a leader who

■ Takes all the credit for work done by others.
■ Is selfish and rude.
The Importance of Leadership: Setting the Stage

- Makes mistakes and blames others.
- Is tyrannical and cruel.
- Cares only about self-preservation.
- Is threatened by competence.
- Is dishonest and unfair.

All these examples are real, all these factors diminish people’s lives at work, and none is necessary. The sad fact is, the percentage of leaders people would be willing to work for again is less than 40 percent. This means that most people would not want to work for the majority of leaders they have had.¹

We are convinced that the weakest link in business, industry, and government today is leadership. It is not technology; it is not tools or equipment; it is not facilities; it is not the skills of employees; it is not systems and procedures. It is leadership. Leadership failure rates range from 40 percent to 60 percent, costing organizations millions of dollars each year.²

What Is Leadership?

Leadership is social influence. It means leaving a mark. It is initiating and guiding, and the result is change. The product is a new character or direction that otherwise would never be. By their ideas and deeds, leaders show the way and influence the behavior of others.³

To understand the importance of ideas, consider the legend of King Arthur, who led the Knights of the Round Table with his vision of chivalry:

My teacher Merlyn, who always remembered things that haven’t happened better than things that have, told me once that a few hundred years from now it will be discovered that the world is round—round like the table at which we sat with such high hope and noble purpose. If you do what I ask, perhaps people will remember how we of Camelot went questing for right and honor and justice. Perhaps one day men will sit around this world as we did once at our table, and go questing once more . . . for right . . . honor . . . and justice.⁴

To understand the importance of deeds, consider the storyteller Homer’s account of Achilles, who led Greek warriors by his heroic feats:

So saying, he plunged once more into the fight and man after man fell before his sword and before his spear. He raged among the Trojans like a whirlwind that drives the flames this way and that when there is a forest fire along the dry slopes of the mountains.⁵

History holds countless examples of ideas and acts that have determined human destiny. Consider the events put in motion and the impact on the world when 56 leaders signed the Declaration of Independence, a Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America, in Congress July 4, 1776.⁶

The Importance of Leadership

Upon every wave of political history has been a Caesar, an Elizabeth, a Napoleon, or a Saladin. In every lull, leadership has been absent. Consider the period of approximately AD 800 to 1000:

Europe lapsed into utter decentralization, and lost for centuries the administrative unity that the reign of Charlemagne promised. A heavy blow was dealt at the slowly developing culture that the eighth century produced. It was not without justice that the ninth and tenth centuries have been called “the Dark Ages.” The internal history of continental Europe became a dismal record of tiresome local feuds and private wars.⁷
Leadership is important not only in government, but in other areas of life as well. Social conscience and conduct have been influenced by reformers such as Martin Luther King and Susan B. Anthony:

Susan B. Anthony was a passionate advocate, who saw “the vote” as the symbol of women’s emancipation and independence as well as the indispensable condition of a true government. . . Although still voteless, she declared, “The world has never witnessed a greater revolution than in the status of women during the past half century.”

The fates of nations have been determined by military figures such as Alexander the Great and Joan of Arc:

Alexander the Great opened a new era in the history of the world and, by his life’s work, determined its development for many centuries. The permanent result of his life was the development of Greek civilization into a civilization that was worldwide.

Civilization has been shaped by philosophers such as John Stuart Mill and Adam Smith:

John Stuart Mill was one of England’s greatest philosophers, hardly surpassed by thinkers of the highest order. Mill taught that a popular representative government (democracy) inevitably makes for progress.

The initiative of leaders has a formative place in history. At times their eloquence, like Churchill’s, may be worth a thousand regiments; their skill, like Napoleon’s, may win battles and establish states. If they are teachers or prophets, like Muhammad, wise in insight, their words may inspire good deeds.

### Three Types of Leaders

There are many ways to lead, and indeed, we are influenced by some people even centuries after they are gone. Some leaders are teachers, who are rule breakers and value creators; some are heroes, responsible for great causes and noble works; and some are rulers, motivated principally to dominate others and exercise power. Consider how the ideas and deeds of the teachers, heroes, and rulers in Table 1–1 have influenced the world.

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<th>Table 1–1</th>
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How Many Leaders Are There?

Are we led by a few, or are there many who lead? Words such as emperor, king, and chief differentiated leaders from others in earlier times. There were few powerful positions, books were rare, and mass education was unknown. Today information is everywhere, ideas are free, and self-expression is encouraged. It is a different world, as evidenced by the 66th edition of *Who's Who in America, 2012*, which contains entries for more than 96,000 people. Each of these individuals, by ideas or deeds, has influenced the lives of others; each has been a teacher, hero, or ruler.

There is a changing perception of who can be a leader today. The response is heard over and over: Everyone can be a leader. Leadership is shifting from an autocratic, hierarchical model toward an empowering, participatory model. The new definition recognizes the potential and unique contributions of everyone. As former secretary of labor Robert Reich says, “Everyone has a leader inside.” No longer is leadership viewed as a combination of charisma and expertise possessed by only a few people at the top of an organizational pyramid. Today it is viewed as the challenge and responsibility of every individual with potential to make a difference.

Consider the example of Rosa Parks, whose courage helped determine the course of civil rights in American society:

It was December 1, 1955, when a white passenger aboard a Montgomery, Alabama, bus asked Rosa Parks to yield her seat. Her refusal to move to the back of the bus ended in her arrest, but began the nonviolent protest movement for civil rights in the United States. A year-long boycott of the Montgomery bus system, led by Martin Luther King, forced the issue of the South’s Jim Crow laws to the forefront of America’s consciousness. The Supreme Court’s 1956 decision to declare segregation laws unconstitutional signaled a victory for Parks, of whom King said “she had been tracked down by the Zeitgeist—the spirit of time.”

In meaningful ways, leadership is provided by the multitude of people who influence their families, friends, work groups, and organizations. Responding to situations in work and life that require leadership, “episodic” leaders include parents, supervisors, officers, and other leadership figures. Think of your own experiences. Have you not at some time provided leadership to others, either by your ideas or by the example you set?

How Qualities of the Individual and Environmental Factors Influence the Leadership Process

The leadership scholar James MacGregor Burns once called leadership one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth. Questions frequently asked are, Which is more important—the individual or the environment? Are leaders born or made? In his book *Leadership*, Burns concludes that leadership is fired in the forge of both personal ambition and social opportunity.

Historically, leadership has been attributed to the individual. This view is sometimes called the “great man theory.” Reflecting this view, the Scottish philosopher and historian Thomas Carlyle believed that among the undistinguished masses are people of light and learning, individuals superior in power, courage, and understanding. Carlyle saw the history of the human race as the biographies of these leaders, its great men and women: “Their moral character may be something less than perfect; their courage may not be the essential ingredient; yet they are superior. They are followed, admired, and obeyed to the point of worship.”
Ralph M. Stogdill, one of the most distinguished scholars on leadership, has found certain traits of the individual that correlate positively with leadership:

The leader is characterized by: a strong drive for responsibility and task completion; vigor and persistence in pursuit of goals; venturesomeness and originality in problem-solving; drive to exercise initiative in social situations; self-confidence and sense of personal identity; willingness to accept consequences of decision and action; readiness to absorb interpersonal stress; willingness to tolerate frustration and delay; ability to influence other persons’ behavior; and capacity to structure social interaction systems to the purpose at hand.

It can be concluded that the cluster of characteristics listed above differentiate leaders from followers, effective from ineffective leaders, and higher echelon from lower echelon leaders. In other words, different strata of leaders and followers can be described in terms of the extent to which they exhibit these characteristics. These characteristics considered individually hold little diagnostic or predictive significance. In combination, it would appear that they interact to generate personality dynamics advantageous to the person seeking the responsibilities of leadership.

Environmental Factors

More recently, leadership has been viewed as an acquired competency, the product of many forces, not the least of which are environment and circumstance. In this sense, leadership is seen as a social phenomenon, not an individual trait. This school of thought helps explain why leaders who are successful in one situation (for example, building a bridge) may not be successful in another (such as directing a play or a research team). The same individual may exert leadership in one time and place and not in another. Stogdill explains:

It should be noted that to a large extent our conceptions of characteristics of leadership are culturally determined. The ancient Egyptians attributed three qualities of divinity to their king. They said of him, “Authoritative utterance is in thy mouth, perception is in thy heart, and thy tongue is the shrine of justice.” This statement would suggest that the Egyptians were demanding of their leader the qualities of authority, discrimination, and just behavior.

An analysis of Greek concepts of leadership, as exemplified by different leaders in Homer’s Iliad, showed four aspects were valued: (1) justice and judgment—Agamemnon; (2) wisdom and counsel—Nestor; (3) shrewdness and cunning—Odysseus; and (4) valor and action—Achilles. All of these qualities were admired by the Greeks. Shrewdness and cunning are not as highly regarded in our contemporary society as they once were (although justice, judgment, wisdom, valor, and action remain in high esteem).

The patterns of behavior regarded as acceptable in leaders differ from time to time and from one culture to another; thus, the establishment of educational institutions and curricula to impart and reinforce knowledge, skills, and attitudes deemed to be important by a society or group.

Probably the most convincing support for leadership as a social phenomenon is the fact that throughout history, male leaders have outnumbered female leaders to a significant degree. Even the definition of the word leader is a social phenomenon. Consider the case of “President” Edith Wilson, leader in all but name during the incapacitating illness of her husband, President Woodrow Wilson. It is Woodrow, however, whom history credits as leader, as president, even during the period of his inability to govern. Public recognition of Mrs. Wilson’s influence would not have been in line with the norms of the times.

Interaction between the Individual and the Environment

A student showed his father his report card containing 5 F’s. He said, “Dad, it’s either heredity or environment. What do you think?” Evidence shows that both the qualities of the individual and environmental factors are important elements in the leadership equation. Leadership results from the inextricable interaction between the two. Findings from sociobiological studies of other animal species support this view. For example, biologist Richard Borowsky has discovered spontaneous growth among male fish. Young males remain small and sexually underdeveloped until the adult population in the group is reduced. Then, size and sexual maturation accelerate dramatically. Clearly, biological and sociological systems are closely related.
Similar signs of sudden maturation are found in human beings. Leaders may emerge spontaneously in social crises after filling essentially anonymous roles for years. Consider the transformation of Poland’s Lech Walesa from shipyard worker to national labor leader during the 1980s. Some people seem to have innate abilities that unfold under certain conditions—external circumstances and internal qualities interact to create a sudden and dramatic spurt of performance. Before becoming president, the biggest staff Abraham Lincoln managed was a law office of one junior partner and several clerks. Lincoln grew in office as if destiny required him, as he put it, to “rise to the occasion.”

Where Leaders Learn to Lead and What People Want in a Leader

In the most extensive study ever done on leadership, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce sought to answer two questions: (1) Where do leaders learn to lead? and (2) What do people want in a leader?22

The number one place people say they learn to lead is from experience. They are thrown in the water and expected to sink or swim. Common Cause founder John W. Gardner identifies his arduous experience as a Marine during World War II as the “learning crucible” in which his own leadership abilities emerged.23 Ask yourself how much of your leadership approach and skill you have learned from experience.

The second most-cited place people learn to lead is from examples or models. They watch Bill or Jill lead and it seems to work out, so they do the same. They watch Sarah or Sam lead and it doesn’t work out, so they resolve never to use those methods or techniques. Who have been your models or examples in the practice of leadership?

The third most-cited place people say they learn to lead is from books and school. Formal education, learning seminars, and professional reading can provide valuable information and insight. What book, theory, or class has helped in the development of your leadership skills?

Even more interesting, especially for leaders, is to know what people want in a leader. Desired qualities change across culture and time, but what people say they want most in American society is integrity. When people are asked to define integrity, the word they mention most frequently is honesty. The leader with integrity always tells the truth as he or she believes it to be. Think about the best leader you have ever had; she or he probably had integrity. First and foremost, people want a leader they can trust. Ask yourself whether you have a reputation for integrity.

The second most-cited quality people want in a leader is job knowledge. This quality ranges from knowing what direction to take (abstract visioning) to knowing how to solve problems (practical ability). Again, think about the best leader you have ever had; it is likely that this person had a purpose, a plan, and the skill to succeed. Moreover, truly great leaders keep job knowledge current. They know what it takes to be effective in the leadership position—they are good but not complacent, and they continually strive to improve. How do you currently rate on the job knowledge scale?

The third most-cited quality people want in a leader can be summarized as people-building skills. This quality includes the ability to assemble and develop a winning team, and it involves a variety of important skills: performance planning, performance coaching, and correcting poor performance; effective delegation; effective discipline; and the ability to motivate. People want an empowering leader who will be a mentor and developer of others. Do you have the interest, ability, and patience required to motivate and develop others?24 (See Exercise 1–1.)
Exercise 1–1
Personalizing Leadership

1. Where have you learned your leadership skills? Describe each pertinent learning area.
   ■ Personal experience
     
   ■ Examples or models
     
   ■ Books, school, and online learning
     

2. Do you possess the qualities people want in a leader? Support your response.
   ■ Integrity (honesty)—resulting in trust
     
   ■ Job knowledge—resulting in confidence
     
   ■ People-building skills—resulting in motivation and teamwork
     

Satisfactions and Frustrations of Leaders

Approximately 1 out of every 10 people in the American workplace is classified as a supervisor, administrator, or manager. Management author Andrew DuBrin identifies seven satisfactions and seven frustrations that individuals in leadership roles typically experience. If you are a leader, make note of the ones that relate to you.

Satisfactions of Leaders

1. A feeling of power and prestige. Being a leader typically grants one power and a sense of importance.
2. A chance to help others. A leader works directly with people, often teaching them job skills, serving as a mentor and an advisor.
3. High income. Leaders, in general, receive higher pay than nonleaders, and executive leaders typically earn substantial incomes.
4. Respect and status. A leader is typically respected by group members and enjoys a higher status than people who are not occupying leadership roles.
5. Opportunities for advancement. Once one becomes a leader, advancement opportunities usually increase.
6. A feeling of being in a position of knowledge. A leader typically receives more information than do nonleaders.
7. An opportunity to control money and other resources. A leader is typically in the position of determining budgets and authorizing expenses.

Frustrations of Leaders

1. Too much uncompensated work time. People in leadership positions typically work longer hours than nonleaders. During periods of high demand, working hours can surge to 80 hours per week and more.
2. Too many problems. A leader is subject to the universe of problems involving people and things. The leader is expected to address problems and get them solved.
3. Not enough authority to carry out responsibility. People in leadership positions may be held responsible for outcomes over which they have little control.
4. Loneliness. The higher one rises as a leader, the more lonely it can be. Leadership limits the number of people in whom one can confide.
5. Too many problems involving people. A frustration facing a leader is the number of people problems requiring action. The more employees one has, the more problems one is likely to face.
6. Organizational politics. The leader must engage in political byplay from three directions: below, sideways, and above. Although tactics such as forming alliances and coalitions are a necessary part of a leader’s role, it can be particularly frustrating if people purposefully work against each other within an organization.
7. The pursuit of conflicting goals. A major challenge facing leaders is navigating among conflicting goals. The central issue of such dilemmas is attempting to grant others the authority to act independently, yet still get them aligned and pulling together for a common purpose.

At this time, do the satisfactions of leadership outweigh the frustrations you may have, or is the opposite the case? Consider the pros and cons of your leadership position.
Caring Leadership

Whether one leads by word or deed; whether a leader is teacher, hero, or ruler; whether leadership is inborn or formed; no matter where one learns to lead; no matter the arena where leadership occurs; no matter the level of satisfaction or frustration a leader may feel; there is an essential ingredient necessary for success. The leader must care. Only when the leader cares will others care. Only when the leader cares will there be focus and energy for the work to be done.

There are two aspects of caring leadership: First is commitment to a task; second, and equally important, is concern for people. Theodore Roosevelt captures the spirit of the caring leader with a task to achieve:

> The credit goes to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred with sweat and dust and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows the triumph of high achievement; and who, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly. Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those cold and timid souls who live in the gray twilight that knows not victory nor defeat.\(^{27}\)

With fervor and eloquence, Roosevelt blasts a life of ease and advocates a strenuous life of engagement and meaning. For the caring leader, this means personal commitment to accomplish a goal. The goal may be a one-time endeavor or a life’s work. The goal may be a tangible product, such as the creation of a business, or it may be an idea or a cause, such as stamping out tyranny. In any case, the leader’s commitment becomes contagious, igniting the emotions of all who are present.

Caring leadership also means caring about people. The caring leader is unselfish, ready and eager to hear the other person’s story. The caring leader will dedicate her- or himself in service to others. Concern for others results in loyalty to the leader and dedication to the leader’s goals.\(^{29}\) Jan Carlzon, former chairman and CEO of Scandinavian Airlines, explains the importance of caring leadership in the work setting: “In my experience, I have learned there are two great motivators in life. One is fear. The other is love. You can manage people by fear, but if you do, it will diminish both them and you. The path to success begins in the heart.”\(^{29}\)

James Autry, former CEO of the Meredith Corporation, reminds us that caring leadership must come from the heart, from within, not from policy books. Sharing the wisdom of years of experience in his wonderful volume Love and Profit, Autry states, “If you don’t truly care about people, you should get out of leadership; it will save a lot of people a lot of trouble and maybe even a heart attack.” He captures the spirit of the caring leader in a poem entitled “Threads.”\(^{30}\)
Threads

Sometimes you just connect, like that, no big thing maybe, but something beyond the usual business stuff. It comes and goes quickly so you have to pay attention, a change in the eyes when you ask about the family, a pain flickering behind the statistics about a boy and a girl in school, or about seeing them every other Sunday.

An older guy talks about his bride, a little affection after 25 years. The hot-eyed achiever laughs before you want him to. Someone tells you about his wife’s job or why she quit working to stay home. An old joker needs another laugh on the way to retirement. A woman says she spends a lot of her salary on an au pair and a good one is hard to find but worth it because there is nothing more important than the baby.

Listen. In every office you hear the threads of love and joy and fear and guilt, the cries for celebration and reassurance, and somehow you know that connecting those threads is what you are supposed to do and business takes care of itself.

Both commitment to a goal and concern for others must be present for caring leadership to occur. Without commitment there is no passion, and without concern there is no loyalty. Caring leadership cannot be legislated, and it cannot be an act. It is either present or not. When the leader cares, others become focused and energized. It is at this point that direction and momentum develop and great achievements are made.

Leadership in the Work Setting

Leadership is an important and difficult task, and it is the cornerstone of organizational success. Management author John Kotter describes the need for effective leadership at work, saying that too many organizations are overmanaged and underled. Too much emphasis on order and control, and not enough emphasis on motivation and creativity can reduce vitality and lead to failure. What is needed is development of leadership capacity at all levels of responsibility. With good selection, training, and encouragement, many more people can play valuable leadership roles.31

The question is often asked, What is the difference between leadership and management? These are terms that are often used interchangeably. Management involves four functions or processes first identified by Henri Fayol in 1916: planning, organizing, directing, and controlling, all of which are essential for organizational success. The term leadership is popularly used to describe what takes place in the first three of these functions—establishing a direction (planning), aligning people and resources (organizing), and energizing people to accomplish results (directing). These processes require insight, decisiveness, courage, strength, resolve, diplomacy, and other important leadership qualities to be successful.32
Another way to describe the difference between management and leadership is to say that management denotes formal authority and accountability is delegated, while leadership is the ability to influence the activity or behavior of people. The primary purpose of management is to provide order and consistency, a bottom-line focus; the primary function of leadership is to produce change and movement, a top-line focus.

Successful organizations have excellent management to ensure execution and great leadership to provide vision and strategy. If an organization has strong management without leadership, the result can be reliable accomplishment of the wrong things. If an organization has strong leadership without management, the result can be inconsistent performance. The political theorist Karl Marx observed that the manner in which a society does its work shapes most of the other things the society believes and does. This belief only adds to the importance of leadership in the work setting. Principles and practices on the job are repeated and have impact in the home and larger community.

Nine Key Areas of Leadership

The successful leader must master the art of leadership, with nine key areas for success. If people cannot decide which course of action to take or if they are not making satisfactory progress along a chosen path, breakdown occurs. Breakdown can be traced to deficiency in one or more of these areas:

*The leadership equation*—understanding the influence of leadership qualities, characteristics of followers, and the nature of situations.

*The power of vision*—establishing a clear and compelling direction and a plan to succeed.

*The importance of ethics*—leading by moral principles, goodness of character, and personal courage.

*The empowerment of people*—fostering a high-performance culture through participative leadership and service to others.

*Leadership principles*—demonstrating human relations skills, managing morale, and developing a winning team.

*Understanding people*—comprehending human motivation, the art of persuasion, and the value of diversity.

*Multiplying effectiveness*—using delegation skills and dealing effectively with different kinds of people.

*Developing others*—understanding the role of the leader as teacher, helping people through change, and developing adaptive capacity.

*Performance management*—achieving organizational success through personal humility, fierce resolve, and sustained discipline.

Each key area is discussed in the following pages. Also included are principles and techniques to improve leadership effectiveness, along with questionnaires and learning exercises to personalize the concepts. These apply at all levels of leadership responsibility and to the full range of leadership situations, from leading intellectuals in the lab, to leading artists in the studio, to leading producers in the field.
Chapter One Summary

After reading Chapter One, you should know the following key concepts, principles, and terms. Fill in the blanks from memory, or copy the answers listed below.

Leadership is social influence. By (a) _________ and _________, leaders light the path and influence the behavior of people. Types of leaders include (b) _________, _________, and _________.

Two basic factors that influence the leadership process are (c) _________, and _________.

People learn to lead primarily from (d) _________, _________, and _________.

The three qualities people want most in a leader are (e) _________, _________, and _________.

Satisfactions of being a leader include (f) _________, _________, and _________.

Frustrations of being a leader include (g) _________, _________, and _________.

The two essential elements of caring leadership are (h) _________ and _________.

Leadership, in essence, is (i) _________, _________, and _________.

Answer Key for Chapter One Summary

a. ideas, deeds, page 2

b. teachers, heroes, rulers, page 3

c. qualities of the individual, environmental factors, page 5

d. experience, examples, books and school, page 6

e. integrity, job knowledge, people-building skills, page 6

f. (any three) a feeling of power and prestige, a chance to help others, high income, respect and status, opportunities for advancement, a feeling of being in a position of knowledge, an opportunity to control money and other resources, page 9

g. (any three) too much uncompensated work time, too many problems, not enough authority to carry out responsibility, loneliness, too many problems involving people, organizational politics, the pursuit of conflicting goals, page 9

h. commitment to a task, concern for people, page 10

i. establishing a direction, aligning people and resources, energizing people to accomplish results, page 11