

# Learning Leadership: The Five Fundamentals of Becoming an Exemplary Leader

Arguably the most trusted names in the field of leadership, [James Kouzes](#) and [Barry Posner](#) have done it again! Eminently qualified to command an audience on all things leadership, in their most recent book ***Learning Leadership: The Five Fundamentals of Becoming an Exemplary Leader***, they provide a compelling argument and clear pathway for charting out your development as a leader over the long haul. Not only will it encourage you, but it will provide clarity on your next faithful step for your growth as a leader.

Title: ***Learning Leadership: The Five Fundamentals of Becoming an Exemplary Leader***

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## Book Description:

***Learning Leadership: The Five Fundamentals of Becoming an Exemplary Leader*** is a comprehensive guide to unleashing the inner-leader in us all and to building a solid foundation for a lifetime of leadership growth and mastery. The book offers a concrete framework to help individuals of all levels, functions, and backgrounds take charge of their own leadership development and become the best leaders they can be. Arguing that all individuals are born with the capacity to lead, Kouzes and Posner provide readers with a practical series of actions and specific coaching tips for harnessing that capacity and creating a context in which they can excel. Supported by over 30 years of research, from over seventy countries, and with examples from real-world leaders, ***Learning Leadership*** is a clarion call to unleash the leadership potential that is already present in today's society.

## Book Quotes:

The larger purpose of this book is to share with you what we've learned about how you can create the conditions, inside yourself and in the context in which you live and work, to become a much better leader than you are today. LOCATION: 444

We show that you can learn to be a better leader than you are today if you believe in yourself, aspire to be great, challenge yourself to grow, engage the support of others, and practice deliberately. LOCATION: 447

You already have the capacity to lead, but some prevailing myths and assumptions about leadership get in the way of your becoming the best leader you can be. To become an exemplary leader, you have to move past the myths and get down to applying the fundamentals that will enable you to learn and grow as a leader.

LOCATION: 556

Our research shows that a universal set of leadership practices is associated with exemplary leadership, and

these practices are within the capacity of everyone to follow. The challenge is to increase the frequency with which you engage in these leadership practices and become more comfortable and confident in their use.

LOCATION: 562

Let's get something straight right from the start. Leadership is not some mystical quality that only a few people have and everyone else doesn't. Leadership is not preordained. Neither is it the private reserve of a special class of charismatic men and women. Leadership is not a gene. It is not a trait. There is just no hard evidence to suggest that leadership is imprinted in the DNA of some people and not others. LOCATION: 580

Leadership is not a talent that you have or you don't. In fact, it is not a talent but an observable, learnable set of skills and abilities. Leadership is distributed in the population like any other set of skills. LOCATION: 610

Nothing could be further from the truth. Leadership is not a rank, a title, or a place. Look it up in the dictionary. You'll find that leadership starts with a lowercase l. And the word lead literally comes from an Old English word meaning "to go" or "to guide." That's what leadership is about: going places and guiding others. LOCATION: 627

Leading is about the actions you take, not the position you hold. It's about the values that guide your decisions and actions. It's about the visions you have for yourself and others. To become an exemplary leader, the second fundamental is that you have to aspire to excel. LOCATION: 635

Over all the years we've been researching leadership, we've consistently found that adversity and uncertainty characterize every personal-best leadership experience. LOCATION: 657

Leadership is a team sport and not a solo performance. LOCATION: 669

What actually differentiates the expert performers from the good performers is their dedication to doing something every day to improve. The truth is that the best leaders become the best because they work hard at it and put in the hours of practice. LOCATION: 692

It's been said that only three things happen naturally in organizations: friction, confusion, and underperformance; everything else requires leadership. LOCATION: 758

There's clearly a difference between people's worst and best leaders...the best leaders bring out more than three times the amount of talent, energy, and motivation from their people compared with their counterparts at the other end of the spectrum. LOCATION: 778

The data confirm that leadership makes a difference. That difference can be negative or positive, but it does make a difference. Leadership has an impact on people's commitment, their desire to stay or leave, their willingness to put forth more discretionary effort, and their inclination to take personal initiative and responsibility. Bad leaders have a dampening effect on these things, and exemplary leaders have just the opposite effect. What sort of difference do you want to achieve through your leadership? The choice is yours. LOCATION: 792

It certainly makes sense that how leaders behave explains how engaged their direct reports are in the workplace, but what you might not expect is that the leaders' own behavior also explains how they feel about the workplace. LOCATION: 853

There is no single mold or distinct personality profile for leadership. Leaders come in all types, shapes, sizes, and colors. There is not one look or style. You are unique, and you don't have to be anyone else but who you are. LOCATION: 865

What differentiates leaders from nonleaders is not so much outside the person (the exterior) as it is the interior. Leadership is not a position or place in an organization. It's not confined to a particular job description. LOCATION: 870

The key empirical takeaway from our research is that effective leaders demonstrate exemplary leader behaviors more frequently than their less effective colleagues do. LOCATION: 880

Leaders can differ in lots of personal ways, but exemplary leaders universally engage in very similar practices. You are a unique person, but there are common leadership practices that bring out the best in others. LOCATION: 900

The key message of this chapter is this: Leadership makes a significant difference in levels of engagement and commitment. LOCATION: 904

Leadership is not about personality; it's about behavior. LOCATION: 985

These are The Five Practices along with the two key essential leadership commitments connected with each one:

- Model the Way
  - Clarify values by finding your voice and affirming shared values
  - Set the example by aligning actions with shared values
- Inspire a Shared Vision
  - Envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities
  - Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations
- Challenge the Process
  - Search for opportunities by seizing the initiative and by looking outward for innovative ways to improve
  - Experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from experience
- Enable Others to Act
  - Foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships
  - Strengthen others by increasing self-determination and developing competence
- Encourage the Heart
  - Recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence
  - Celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community

LOCATION: 991

These results underscore the earlier assertion that everyone is capable of engaging in the leadership behaviors

identified as essential to achieving record-setting standards of excellence. The inescapable fact is not that people aren't leading (or capable of leadership) but that people are not leading frequently enough! How about you? Are you leading frequently enough? LOCATION: 1034

The best leaders are the best learners. They have a growth mindset. They believe that they are capable of learning and developing throughout their lives. LOCATION: 1146

Authentic leadership flows from the inside out. You have to liberate that capacity you already have, and that begins by taking an inner journey to discover who you are. LOCATION: 1149

Learning to lead is about discovering what you value, what inspires you, what challenges you, what gives you energy, and what encourages you. When you discover these things about yourself, you'll also know more about what it takes to lead those qualities out of others. LOCATION: 1176

So ask yourself: Are you pushing yourself to learn something new when it comes to leadership every day? Or, are you just doing what you already know how to do? Are you stretching yourself to go beyond your comfort zone—beyond what you do well enough—and engaging in activities that test you and build new skills? Are you learning? LOCATION: 1339

It doesn't matter how you learn. What matters is that you do more of whatever learning tactic works best for you. Clearly linked to becoming a better leader is becoming a better learner. The best leaders are the best learners. LOCATION: 1357

Learning is the master skill. When you fully engage in learning—when you throw yourself wholeheartedly into experimenting, reflecting, reading, or getting coaching—you're going to experience improvement. Perhaps even greatness. Less is not more when it comes to learning. More is more. When it comes to getting great at leading or anything for that matter, you have to keep on learning. LOCATION: 1381

The primary instrument for leaders is the self. That's all leaders have to work with. It's not going to be code written by some brilliant programmer, apps on a smartphone, or clever phrases of a speechwriter that are going to make people better leaders. What leaders do with themselves makes the most difference. Mastery of the art of leadership comes from the mastery of the self. Ultimately, you will see, leadership development is self-development. LOCATION: 1492

Authentic leadership flows from the inside out. It does not come from the outside in. Inside-out leadership is about discovering who you are, what compels you to do what you do, and what gives you the credibility to lead others. LOCATION: 1496

To become the very best leader you can be, you need to be clear about the core values and beliefs that guide your decisions and actions. You have to determine what you care most about and why it's important. LOCATION: 1629

Top-performing leaders don't focus on making money, getting a promotion, or being famous. They want to lead because they care deeply about the mission and people they are serving. LOCATION: 1631

Leadership is not just about you and about realizing only your values and vision. It's more about helping others realize theirs. Exemplary leaders and their constituents are in service of a larger purpose—a purpose beyond the self. Your success as a leader is inextricably linked to how successful you can make others. LOCATION: 1635

Think about a historical leader that you admire, someone you could imagine following willingly. We've asked

people around the world to answer this question, and all the individuals they identify are ones with strong beliefs about matters of principle. They all had unwavering commitment to a clear set of values. Similarly, the personal-best leadership cases we collected are, at their core, stories of individuals who remained true to deeply held values. LOCATION: 1643

To become an exemplary leader, you have to discover what is important to you, what you care about, and what you value. You can be the author of your own story and the maker of your own history only when you clarify the principles that you believe should guide you in your work and life. LOCATION: 1657

How can you speak out if you don't know what's important to you? How can you have the courage of your convictions if you have no convictions? How can you stand up if you've nothing to stand upon? The leaders people admire the most, whether public figures or personal acquaintances, are those who had strong beliefs about matters of principle, an unwavering commitment to a clear set of values, and passion about their causes. LOCATION: 1684

The evidence is conclusive: You can be effective only when you are leading according to the principles that matter most to you. Otherwise, you are simply putting on an act, one that people can see through over time. When you have clarified your values and found your voice, you will have the inner confidence necessary to express ideas, choose a direction, make tough decisions, act with determination, and take charge of your life rather than impersonating others. It's also not surprising that work is more fulfilling and rewarding when it is consistent with your values. LOCATION: 1718

Why you chose to do something in the first place can well determine whether you'll be successful at it years later. Success seems to follow those who engage in something because the endeavor has intrinsic value in itself and not because of the extrinsic rewards that will come from doing it. Deciding what you care about is a part of, and not apart from, being successful in your life and career. Studies of entrepreneurs show similar results: The missionaries outperform the mercenaries. Those with a mission to change the world are more successful than those who build to an exit strategy so that they can make lots of money. LOCATION: 1747

We've surveyed thousands of people worldwide on what they want in their leaders, and they tell us that being forward-looking (visionary, foresighted, concerned about the future, and having a sense of direction) is second only to honesty as their most admired leader quality. LOCATION: 1811

The daily pressures, the pace of change, the complexity of problems, and the turbulence in global marketplaces can often hold your mind hostage and make you think that you have neither the time nor the energy to be more future oriented. But attending to the future doesn't have to be in addition to everything else you are already busy doing. As counterintuitive as it might seem, the best place to start creating the future is by being more mindful in the present. LOCATION: 1844

The best leaders are and have been those who are the keenest observers of the human condition. They just pay more attention than everyone else does to all that's around them. LOCATION: 1858

Becoming an exemplary leader fundamentally changes who you are. It changes your relationship with yourself. You're no longer just an individual contributor. You're now someone who takes people on journeys to places they've never been. LOCATION: 1892

Leadership is about shared vision and values. It's about getting everyone aligned with a common purpose, a common cause. LOCATION: 1965

Research also shows that viewing your work as a calling as compared to seeing it as a job or a career leads to the highest levels of satisfaction with both your work and your life. LOCATION: 2057

Challenge is your leadership training ground. Get curious and go kick the ball around. Get gritty, and stay hardy. Courage gives you the strength to grow. LOCATION: 2124

To become a better leader, you have to step out of your comfort zone. You have to challenge the conventional ways of doing things and search for opportunities to innovate. Exercising leadership not only requires you to challenge the organizational status quo but also requires you to challenge your internal status quo. You have to challenge yourself. You have to venture beyond the boundaries of your current experience and explore new territory. Those are the places where there are opportunities to improve, innovate, experiment, and grow. Growth is always at the edges, just outside the boundaries of where you are right now. LOCATION: 2144

Challenge is the defining context for leadership. We've consistently found this to be the case in our research on what people are doing when performing at their personal best as leaders. And not only is it the context for leadership, but it's also the context for learning. LOCATION: 2156

Our research shows that: Opportunities to challenge the status quo and introduce change open the door to doing one's best. Challenge is the motivating environment for excellence. Challenging opportunities often bring forth skills and abilities that people don't know they have. Given opportunity and support, time and again ordinary people can get extraordinary things done in organizations. People who become leaders don't always seek the challenges they face. Challenges also seek leaders. LOCATION: 2167

Leadership scholar Warren Bennis has said that "Leaders learn by leading, and they learn best by leading in the face of obstacles. As weather shapes mountains, problems shape leaders. Difficult bosses, lack of vision and virtue in the executive suite, circumstances beyond their control, and their own mistakes have been the leaders' basic curriculum." LOCATION: 2210

One simple way to exercise initiative is by being curious. When you're intrigued by something, you become inquisitive, and you're eager to know the answer to questions. LOCATION: 2333

Questions send people on journeys in their minds. Knowing what to ask and how to ask it are critical skills for leaders and learners. The better the question, the more rewarding the journey is. Preparing to ask questions forces you to think about what you'd like to learn. LOCATION: 2355

Try something new, fail, learn. Try something new, fail, learn. Try something new, fail, learn. This phrase should be one of your leadership mantras. LOCATION: 2381

Anyone who's ever tried to learn something new knows that you don't just get it in one day or two or even 10. It takes a long-term commitment. It requires dedication. It requires focus. It requires a clear and measurable goal. It requires feedback. It requires hours and hours of practice. All of that demands perseverance, not giving up in the middle, and a willingness to deal with hardship and failure. In a word, grit. LOCATION: 2491

Hardiness is a pattern of attitudes and skills that enables people to respond adaptively under high-stress conditions. Researchers over the last 40 years have discovered that in groups as diverse as corporate managers, entrepreneurs, students, nurses, lawyers, and combat soldiers, those high in hardiness are much more likely to withstand serious challenges than those low in hardiness are. LOCATION: 2531

There are three fundamental beliefs to being hardy: commitment, control, and challenge. To turn adversity into advantage, first you need to commit yourself to what's happening. You have to get involved, engaged, and curious. You can't sit back and wait for something to happen. You also have to take control of your life. You need to make an effort to influence what is going on. Although not all your attempts may be successful, you can't sink into powerlessness or passivity. Finally, if you are going to be psychologically hardy, you need to view challenge as an opportunity to learn from both negative and positive experiences. You can't play it

safe. LOCATION: 2535

Although you obviously don't control all of what is happening in the broader environment, you are still in charge of your life. When facing a new challenge, or even responding to a conflict or crisis, determine the factors you can influence and those you can't. Figure out some ways you can positively affect the outcome. For example, take a few small steps initially to get moving in the right direction and create some forward momentum. Most important, you need to place a learning frame around your leadership experiences.

LOCATION: 2575

The ability to face adversity without being overcome by fear is courage. Like grit, it involves the capacity to persist under extremely challenging circumstances but includes the additional element of fear. Not everything that requires grit requires courage, but everything that requires courage also requires grit. Courage is not about being fearless so much as it is about being able to control your fear. LOCATION: 2675

When you remind yourself why you are doing something challenging—when you can find the meaning in the hard work and energy required to make a change—your brain will see the situation more as a motivator than as a source of stress. Shawn Achor, chief executive officer (CEO) of Good Think Inc., where he researches and teaches about positive psychology, supports this perspective in reporting that people's brains rebel when they divorce meaning from the activity in which they are engaged. LOCATION: 2697

One further benefit: Gratitude, it turns out, is the best predictor of personal well-being. LOCATION: 2875

Making something extraordinary happen has always required the engagement, trust, and support of others; and similarly, you can't learn to lead in a vacuum. Without the trust, support, and encouragement of others, you will not be able to venture out very far. LOCATION: 2884

Understanding and sharing the feelings of others enables you to interpret people's viewpoints effectively. Professor Ernest J. Wilson III, dean of the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism at the University of Southern California, asserts that empathy is the most essential attribute leaders need to succeed in today's volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) world. LOCATION: 2943

Research shows very clearly that when social connections are numerous and strong, there's more trust, reciprocity, information flow, collective action, happiness, and wealth. LOCATION: 3071

Consider connecting with people who are not particularly well known or flashy but who exhibit deep competence, unswerving dedication, and a good sense of who they are. Most important, choose people who make you feel good about yourself because the purpose of this relationship, after all, is to encourage and inspire you to improve yourself. The people with whom you connect should be people who care about you and are interested in your betterment. LOCATION: 3091

People become the leaders they observe. If you want to become an exemplary leader, you have to watch and study exemplary leaders. LOCATION: 3104

Now we would like you to go one step further and propose that you put together a personal board of directors. Your personal board should have four to seven people whom you respect and trust and to whom you can turn when you need counsel on tough questions and ethical dilemmas, guidance during transitions, advice about personal development needs, and help in staying true to your values and beliefs. They should represent a diverse set of skills and experiences and be role models of many of the skills you'd like to develop. LOCATION: 3144

Valid and useful feedback is essential to learning. Learning cannot happen without knowing how you are doing

and without identifying what you need to change to improve. Our research clearly shows that the best leaders are active learners, never believing that they know it all. They remain open to new ideas from a variety of sources, and when it comes to leadership, that feedback has to come from the people you are attempting to influence. They're the only ones who can reliably tell you the impact your actions have on them. Although you have to prepare yourself for those who never have anything positive to say as well as for those who are only going to sugarcoat their comments, asking for feedback is a habit you need to develop. LOCATION: 3207

The late John Gardner, leadership scholar and presidential adviser, once remarked, "Pity the leader caught between unloving critics and uncritical lovers." LOCATION: 3302

If you want to be the best leader you can be, you will have to attend to your weaknesses. You can't delegate or assign to others those leadership behaviors you aren't comfortable doing. If you do, you'll get to be only as good as your weakest skill. Although you may never get as good as someone else at everything you do, by continuously practicing, practicing, and practicing, you can improve. You will also gain an appreciation for why persistence is another one of those attributes that differentiate the best from the wannabes. The very best in life never tire of doing what they can to get even better. LOCATION: 3490

What are the attributes of a culture in which leaders are most likely to thrive and be productive? We recently posed this question to more than 200 leadership educators and developers. Four major clusters of cultural attributes emerged from their responses: trust, opportunities for learning, support for risk and failure, and models of exemplary leadership. LOCATION: 3624

The most frequently occurring word that characterized a culture of leadership was trust. If leaders are going to grow and thrive, people need to trust one another. They need to feel safe around one other, able to be open and honest with one another. They need to support people's growth, have one another's backs, and be there to lift others up when they fall or stumble. They need to be able to collaborate and cheer on everyone. They need to show respect for differences and be open to alternative viewpoints and backgrounds. A culture of leadership that supports collaborative behavior is going to be more hospitable to the development of leaders than one that is internally competitive and focuses on a winner-take-all approach to selecting and promoting leaders. LOCATION: 3628

It's important that you understand how this process works for you, because, as Gretchen Rubin points out in her book *Better Than Before*, "Habits are the invisible architecture of our daily life. We repeat 40 percent of our behavior almost daily, so our habits shape our existence, and our future. If we change our habits, we change our lives." LOCATION: 3809

Leaders spend a lot of time trying to change organizations and other people. Although change is the work of leaders, when implementing change leaders can lose sight of the fact that the only person's behavior anyone can control is his or her own. Changing your behavior and building new skills aren't easy. They're very hard work. That's why it's critical to make learning leadership a habit. Good habits pave the pathway to exemplary leadership. Whatever routine you choose for yourself—whether it's daily reflections, daily self-questioning, or something else—the act of engaging daily in learning leadership is essential to becoming the best leader you can be. LOCATION: 3848

Small acts accumulate and provide momentum. You have to freely choose the actions you take, go public with your choices, and then make sure it's hard to reverse course. When you take these steps, you build your commitment to becoming the best leader you can be. LOCATION: 3912

Everyone wants to have a good day at work. Researchers and authors Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer discovered a significant way to make this happen. "If a person is motivated and happy at the end of the workday, it's a good bet that he or she made some progress. If the person drags out of the office disengaged



and joyless, a setback is most likely to blame.” For example, they found that on good days progress was made 76 percent of the time, but on bad days, progress was made only 25 percent of the time. On bad days, 67 percent of the time there were setbacks, but on good days, there were setbacks only 13 percent of the time. The secret to having a good day, then, is to make progress on your work each day and to prevent setbacks. But there’s a catch. The work has to matter to you so that the progress feels meaningful. Making headway on stuff that you don’t care about doesn’t increase your motivation, engagement, or sense of fulfillment.

LOCATION: 3965

Leadership is a choice. Either you choose to be one, or you don’t. You have other options in life. But when you make that choice, you are taking responsibility for that action. LOCATION: 3999

None of this is easy, by any means. Leadership is hard work. It’s challenging work. There are times when you will suffer. There will be conflicts and struggles. There will be cynics and critics who don’t like what you do. There will be resistance to the changes you want to make. There will be times when you want to give up. As rewarding as it is, leadership can be exhausting. That’s just the reality of leading. And no amount of coaching matters if you don’t want to put in more than minimum effort. LOCATION: 4036

***Note: should you wish to find any quote in its original context, the Kindle “location” is provided after each entry.***