

# THE TRUTH ABOUT LEADERSHIP

Written by: James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner

## INTRODUCTION

The context of leadership has changed over the years. However, the content of leadership has not changed.

Research from over 1 million respondents determined that age makes no difference in determining why leaders are effective or ineffective.

There are ten fundamental truths about leadership.

1. ***You make a difference.*** You must believe in yourself and that you can make a positive impact on others.
2. ***Credibility is the foundation of leadership.*** Not only must you believe in yourself others must believe in you as well.
3. ***Values drive commitment.*** People want to know what you believe in and for what you will take a stand.
4. ***Focusing on the future sets leaders apart.*** Leaders have the capacity to imagine and articulate exciting futures.
5. ***You can't do it alone.*** Leaders need the talent of others to accomplish great things.
6. ***Trust rules.*** Trust is the social glue that holds individuals and groups together.
7. ***Challenge is the crucible for greatness.*** People want to follow those who challenge the status quo.
8. ***You either lead by example or you don't lead at all.*** Leaders keep promises and become role models for the values and behaviors they espouse.
9. ***The best leaders are the best learners.*** Learning is the master skill of leadership.
10. ***Leadership is an affair of the heart.*** Leaders are in love with their constituents (clients, customers or congregations) and the mission they are serving.

## YOU MAKE A DIFFERENCE – TRUTH ONE

The question is not, will I make a difference? It is what difference will I make?

Leadership is not a birthright. It is not about power, position, title, authority etc. Leadership is about **what one does.**

We are influenced most by those closest to us when it comes to leadership. Usually the leader that influences the most is the person who is in direct authority over us.

Good influencers (leaders) employ the five practices of exemplary leadership:

Model the way.

Inspire a shared vision.

Challenge the process.

Enable others to act.

Encourage the heart.

No one makes us a leader. We must take the first step ourselves. We must be willing to take actions that others will want to follow.

We must believe that we can make a difference.

## CREDIBILITY IS THE FOUNDATION OF LEADERSHIP – TRUTH TWO

The key word to people following a leader is the word “willingly”.

The believability of a leader is what causes people to give up their resources to follow any leader. Everyone expects certain things of others including leaders. The top four things people expect of leaders is:

Honest (Tells the truth and lives ethically)

Forward-looking (Sees a preferable future for the organization)

Inspiring (Genuinely enthusiastic and excited about future possibilities)

Competent (Has a track record of accomplishment)

(These four expectations consistently garnered two-thirds or more of all possible options)

If you don't believe in the messenger, you will not believe the message.

**DWYSYWD:** Do what you say you will do.

## VALUES DRIVE COMMITMENT – TRUTH THREE

All good leaders must answer the following questions for their followers:

Who are you?

What do you care about?

Why do you do what you do?

People willingly follow individuals who stand by their principles.

Values represent the core of who you are.

Clarity of values provides the confidence to:

Take the right turns

Make the tough decisions

Act with determination

Take charge of your life

Good leaders communicate clarity about both corporate and personal values.

Success comes when personal and corporate values are aligned.

Good leaders find their voice and are known for that which they will take stands.

Good leaders also find consensus among followers for the values that are embraced.

## FOCUSING ON THE FUTURE SETS LEADERS APART – TRUTH FOUR

The capacity to imagine and articulate exciting future possibilities is the defining competence of leaders.

Forward thinking is second to honesty in the list of desirable traits for leaders. This trait of forward-looking gains in importance the older people are and the more they have been with an organization.

This trait is often under appreciated and little time is often spent developing it.

Forward thinking helps those mired in the details of current problems to be reminded of the larger purpose and gives meaning to current processes.

The key to learning to be forward looking is to look back and examine your past experiences. Examining the past often helps one find the central theme of their life.

Optimism is a key to forward thinking. This means that problems are viewed as opportunities not roadblocks.

## YOU CAN'T DO IT ALONE – TRUTH FIVE

The best way to know if a person is a leader is to see if there are any followers.

The critical success factor for any top three positions in an organization is relationships with subordinates.

Human connection requires critical listening, therefore good leaders listen to their constituents. This means going beyond the words to feelings, desires and fears.

Resonance occurs when leaders are in tune with their closest constituents.

People unite around a shared mission and vision.

People around the leader must feel empowered to take actions critical for success. This empowerment occurs as the leader invests in the personal development of others.

Good leaders do not have all the answers, they just ask great questions.

## TRUST RULES – TRUTH SIX

Credibility is foundational to good leadership and trust is foundational to credibility.

Trust rules your:

- Personal credibility

- Ability to get things done

- Team's cohesiveness

- Organization's innovativeness and performance

- Everything the leader does

The greater the trust in the leader the more influence the leader has with those who follow.

There is a positive relationship between trust and risk. The more people trust the more they will risk.

The leader gains trust by first trusting others. People who demonstrate trust in others are seen as more trustworthy themselves.

The leader must also demonstrate trustworthiness in character (honesty and integrity) and in the leader's abilities (competence and expertise).

The leader facilitates trust when the following happens:

- The leader behaves predictably and consistently

- The leader communicates clearly

- The leader treats promises seriously

- The leader is forthright and candid

## CHALLENGE IS THE CRUCIBLE FOR GREATNESS – TRUTH SEVEN

The study of leadership is the study of how men and women guide people through:

- Uncertainty

- Hardship

- Disruption

- Transformation

- Transition

- Recovery

- New Beginnings

- Other significant challenges

Challenges force leaders to come face with who they are. They remind us of who we are, what we value and where we want to go.

Leaders face challenges by taking charge of any changes that need to occur. They embrace change since change always up new possibilities for the future.

Leaders do focus on what they can control. It is important in dealing with any challenge to be clear on that which the leader can and cannot control.

Those leaders who face challenges best are the ones who are proactive not reactive.

Resilience is not a trait but a learned activity.

All good leaders have grit which is a firmness of spirit or an unyielding courage to act and continue to act in the face of any challenge.

Grit becomes a reality when there is a goal that leader and followers set for which they are passionate and will persevere in order to see the goal achieved.

Leaders also understand that despite their best efforts, failure is a possibility. When failure occurs, it must be viewed as a learning experience to prepare the leader for the next challenge.

## **YOU EITHER LEAD BY EXAMPLE OR YOU DON'T LEAD AT ALL – TRUTH EIGHT**

Leaders are always willing to take action in order to address issues. They are willing to walk the walk as well as talk the talk.

Leading by example is recognized as crucial in various cultures around the world.

Leading by example is known as behavioral integrity.

Followers become cynical, disenchanted, and downright weary when leaders fail to perform as they are asking others to perform.

A key way to lead by example is to keep your promises.

It is also important to admit your mistakes.

Leaders must be willing to accept and live under a system that holds them accountable.

## **THE BEST LEADERS ARE THE BEST LEARNERS – TRUTH NINE**

Much about leadership can be learned.

Much of leadership is observable patterns of practices and behaviors. Leadership does require certain skills and abilities.

Those who master leadership have a strong desire to excel, believe they can improve in their leadership skills, and are willing to devote themselves to continuous learning and deliberate practice.

Research has demonstrated that the best leaders are the best learners.

The rapid pace of change also requires that leaders be constantly learning. The growth mindset is preoccupied with continual learning while a fixed mindset believes that one's best qualities are carved in stone and do not change.

Good leaders must be committed to putting in the time to both learn and then put into practice what has been learned.

Deliberate practice is required which includes:

- Improving performance

- Repeating behaviors

- Constantly getting feedback on new behaviors

- Intense concentration and focus

- Understanding such behavior is not always fun

## **LEADERSHIP IS AN AFFAIR OF THE HEART – TRUTH TEN**

There is no integrity, honor, commitment or conviction without heart.

Leaders are in love with leading, the organization, that which is produced and the people who follow.

Good leaders are not at the center, they constantly place other people there.

Leaders demonstrate to followers that they care by paying attention to them.

Leaders must fall in love with the work they do in order to persevere and help the organization remain on mission.

Leaders also promote the positive. They care deeply and get excited about the good things produced by individuals within the organization.

When people experience a ratio of at least three positive emotions to one negative they are more likely to last long at what they do and be emotionally healthy.

## EPILOGUE

All good leaders begin by saying “yes”

The leader first says “yes” to leading and taking the responsibility to lead.

Leadership begins when individuals believe in themselves, that they can lead, and believe that by leading they can make a positive difference.

Leadership is not about wishful thinking it is about determined doing. The leader sees leadership as a responsibility.

A good leader says “yes” to his/her beliefs, dreams, challenges, collaboration, trust, learning, setting the example and committing the heart to leading.

Summary done by Dr. Paul D. Borden with a few adaptations.