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# What Makes a Great Leader?

By Paul T. P. Wong, Ph.D. C. Psych.,  
Professor of Psychology and Business  
Administration, Chair, Division of Social  
Sciences and Business Administration,  
Tyndale University College, Toronto

Love them or hate them, you can't live without them. They can improve your life and brighten your future, or ruin your life and destroy your future with equal facility. They are the ubiquitous "bosses" and leaders in your life.

Even though Thomas Carlyle's great men theory of history is no longer in vogue, one does not need to be a historian to realize that leaders at the top can make all the difference in the world for good or for evil.

Just ask yourself a simple question: What kind of world would we be living in had Al Gore been elected president of the United States instead of George Bush? Would the world be safer with Gore in the White House?

You may apply this mini "thought experiment" to your own country, organization, school, or church. You might be shocked to discover how a leader's strengths and weaknesses, personal traits, and character flaws can directly impact your life.

Given the serious consequences of leadership, we need to be very serious about whom we vote into office. Beware of any kind of popularity test, because popularity often camouflages a lack of competence and integrity. Don't fall for empty promises and charming smiles. To get to the heart of assessing leadership, we need to ask a tough question: What are the defining characteristics of great leaders?

## Who Are the Greatest American Presidents?

Looking at the current field of American presidential candidates from both parties, can we tell which one of them will

make a great leader? One way to answer this question is to look back to history. Who are the greatest American presidents in the past? What makes them stand head and shoulders above the rest?

Several names consistently appear among the ten greatest presidents according to various rankings. George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Franklin D. Roosevelt typically ranked at the top of these lists. Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Andrew Jackson, Harry S. Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, James K. Polk, John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan have often been ranked in the "top ten."

Not all of them were charismatic leaders, but they were all able to earn the trust of the people because of their integrity and character. The dark forces, which might have destroyed lesser mortals, actually had the opposite effect of enhancing their status and magnifying their exceptional qualities. They have substantially changed the direction of the nation, uplifted the spirit of the people, and left a positive and enduring legacy.

Without exception, these great presidents confronted huge foreign and domestic challenges with courage, wisdom, vision, optimism, and a deep sense of responsibility. They not only overcame enormous difficulties but also achieved phenomenal and lasting success.

For example, Franklin Roosevelt had to face the greatest economic depression in modern history and the combined threats from the Germans and Japanese. He rallied the country after the disaster of Pearl Harbor and created the "arsenal of democracy" to defeat the aggressors. During all those years of titanic struggles, his tired and frail body must have been sustained by some extraordinary inner strength.

Similarly, Ronald Reagan had to simultaneously tackle a failing economy and a hostile “evil empire.” Eventually, he was able to revive the economy while limiting government spending and he won a cold war without bloodshed. He survived a near fatal assassination attempt with courage and humor. His optimism and winsome smile never left him even in the darkest hour.

How do we know who will be the next great president? How can we judge without the benefit of legacy and the wisdom of history? We can’t, but we can still learn something from the greats in the past before casting our votes for the next president or prime minister.

### Who Are the Greatest CEOs?

Great CEOs are also in a league of their own. They are the rare leaders that money cannot buy. They are capable of turning a company from the brink of bankruptcy into a great, enduring organization; they can transform a toxic corporate culture into something inviting and uplifting. Again, we can learn precious lessons from these exceptional leaders.

According to Jeffrey A. Krames (2003) the seven greatest contemporary CEOs are: Michael Dell (Dell Computers), Jack Welch (GE), Lou Gerstner (IBM), Andy Grove (Intel), Bill Gates (Microsoft), Herb Kelleher (Southwest Airlines), and Sam Walton (Wal-Mart). All seven are household names. They all have achieved spectacular successes that benefit consumers. Each has a unique vision and an innovative business strategy, but they all have the courage to embrace change, the passion to pursue their dream, and the competence to carry it out.

Jim Collins (2005), author of *Good to Great* and co-author of *Built to Last*, has identified the ten greatest CEOs of all times. Four criteria were used to winnow a pool of more than 400 successful CEOs: **legacy** (enduring success), **impact** (great innovations), **resilience** (overcoming major crises), and **performance** (outstanding cumulative stock returns). Gates, Grove, Welch, and Gerstner were excluded because they have not been out of office for at least ten years, therefore, they cannot be evaluated in terms of legacy.

What a selection of diverse individuals! Some of them were unlikely CEO materials. Katharine Graham stepped into the position of CEO of the *Washington Post* after her husband’s suicide and rose to the occasion with extraordinary courage and wisdom. William McKnight, creator of 3M, was a bookish accountant who turned innovation into a system of success. Darwin Smith was told “You’ll never be a leader” by the Army’s officer-training school. Yet, he turned Kimberly-Clark into the world’s No. 1 paper-based consumer-products company by selling off all the giant paper mills and refocusing on a sideline product, Kleenex. Charles Coffin, the first president of General Electric, came from the shoe business without any engineering training; yet he created the first research laboratory and a system of creating a succession of brilliant scientists and great executives.

Some CEOs achieved greatness because of their sense of social responsibility. David Packard made social responsibility of sharing wealth a cornerstone of Hewlett-Packard’s corporate culture. David Maxwell turned Fannie Mae from bankruptcy into a great company; his greatest genius, according to Collins, “was to frame the rebuilding around a mission: strengthening America’s social fabric by democratizing home ownership.” James Burke courageously adhered to the credo of Johnson & Johnson—product safety was more important than financial concerns. George Merck put social responsibility above profit; he declared in 1952 that: “Medicine is for people, not for profits.”

Others became great CEOs because of their unique and timely vision. Sam Walton refused to let his charisma get in the way of his mission: to make better things ever more affordable to people of lesser means. Bill Allen built Boeing into a commercial success because he thought in bigger time frames and larger purposes than his critics. One important lesson Allen learned: “Don’t talk too much. Let others talk.”

What made these ten CEOs so great? They loom larger than life, precisely because they gave themselves and their talents totally to serving a larger vision than personal success. They all had dif-

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ferent personal traits and talents, “Yet if one thing defines these ten giants, it was their deep sense of connectedness to the organizations they ran,” Collin wrote. They understood the paradox of leadership: “Much depended on them, but it was never about them.”

## Twelve Defining Characteristics of Great Leaders

What sets apart great leaders from those who are merely good? The above case and the larger leadership literature have pointed to the following twelve defining characteristics. No one leader may possess all these characteristics, but all great leaders must demonstrate at least some of the following strengths and virtues:

1. **Great capacity for productive work**—They seem to possess boundless energy and thrive under stress. They are able to work indefatigably for years on end in order to accomplish an important project. Their stamina and tenacity give them a decided advantage. They manage to work with great enthusiasm even when they cannot get into a state of “flow.” Their consistent productivity is based on their deeply ingrained habits of commitment and discipline.
2. **Great vision for the right direction**—They can see things clearer and farther than others. They have insight into just what is needed and the foresight to see what will succeed in the long run. They can feel the pulse of the world which they inhabit and anticipate the world which is not yet born. Time and time again, they prove that they have the right answer, even when conventional wisdom and tradition dictate otherwise. Their vision is neither a grand illusion, nor abstract ideal. Rather, it is a living document that inspires, unites, and energizes others.
3. **Great intellect and knowledge**—They are intelligent, knowledgeable, and competent not only in their specialty, but also in the general area of humanities, social sciences, and business administration. They have a good grasp of complex issues and the ability to get to the crux of the matter. They have the genius of holding two
- opposing views and the wisdom to navigate cross-currents.
4. **Great people skills**—They work well with all kinds of people from different cultures because they have a deep understanding of human nature and basic human needs that transcend cultures. They see both the bright and dark side of people, without losing faith in the human potential for positive change. They don’t judge others on the basis of beliefs, values, or other cultural characteristics, because they respect the basic human dignity of all people. Understanding and flexibility characterize their leadership style. They know how to resolve conflicts and foster harmony. They know that different folks need different strokes, and they apply different management skills to handle different situations.
5. **Great team-builders**—They do not surround themselves with people who are subservient and loyal only to them, but select competent and creative people who are faithful to the same vision and mission. They welcome diverse opinions and value people who are smarter than they are in various areas of expertise. They know how to put together and manage an A-team to insure organizational success.
6. **Great motivators**—They create a supportive and meaningful work environment and make people feel that they matter to the organization. They generate intrinsic motivation by involving people in the excitement of doing something significant and purposeful. They capitalize on people’s strengths and know how to unleash these inner energies. They see the potential in every person and want to bring out the best in them. They empower workers to develop their potential to become great workers and leaders. They set challenging but realistic goals. By setting an example of excellence in everything they do, they make it the standard for all aspects of their operations.
7. **Great heart**—Their heart is big enough to embrace the entire organization and the whole world. They are

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8. Great communicators
9. Great optimists
10. Great courage
11. Great self-knowledge
12. Great character

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Natural born abilities play an important role, but most of the elements of greatness are acquired, often through trials and tribulations

neither partisan nor petty. They reach out to those who do not agree with them. They don't mind to be proven wrong or outshined by others; their main concern is the common good. They don't hold grudges; they are always ready to forgive and apologize. Their capacity for compassion is equal to their understanding.

8. **Great communicators**—They can articulate a vision and tell compelling stories to rally people around a common goal. They know how to inform as well as inspire. Above all, they are good listeners. They understand people's needs and feelings by talking to them on a personal level. Their ability to resonate with others is based not so much on communication skills as on their deeply felt sense of connectedness with the organization and humanity.
9. **Great optimists**—They stay optimistic even when circumstances are bleak. Their optimism stems from personal faith more than anything else—faith that good will prevail over evil and persistence will eventually lead to success. They know how to inspire hope through difficult times, while battling their own inner doubts. Their proven capacity to endure and overcome inspires others to be optimistic about the unknown.
10. **Great courage**—They have the courage to confront their worst fears and risk everything in order to remain true to their own convictions and other people's trust. Courage is not the absence of fear, but the ability to persist and act in the presence of fear. They know how to live with the continued tension between despair and hope, doubts and confidence, fear and courage. They grow stronger as a result of this constant opposition.
11. **Great self-knowledge**—They know who they are and what they stand for. They know that their strengths contain the seeds of destruction (e.g., over-confidence). They also accept their own weaknesses and limitations as the essential conditions of being human. They are willing to accept negative feedback in order to improve themselves. They would not let their

ego get in the way of doing what is good for the organization. Feeling comfortable in their own skin reduces their defensiveness. Their humility comes from their emotional maturity and self-knowledge.

12. **Great character**—Above all, they possess integrity and authenticity. They have the moral courage to stand up for their beliefs and do what is right, no matter how much it will cost them. To them, integrity is more important than success. Their leadership is principle-centered and purpose-driven, regardless of the pressure to make expedient. They are transparent and genuine; they say what they mean and they walk the talk. They accept responsibility for their choices and would not blame others for their own mistakes. They do not steal credits from others. One of their greatest assets is their "reputational capital." Others can always bank on their trustworthiness, because they serve as symbols of morality and ethics.

## Conclusion

This list of exceptional qualities suggests that great leaders are made rather than born. A hunger for learning, good work ethics, character strengths, and people skills can all be cultivated. Natural born abilities play an important role, but most of the elements of greatness are acquired, often through trials and tribulations.

To be a great leader one needs first to become a positive person of sterling qualities. When it comes to leadership, character counts more than competence, and what you are matters more than what you do. A great leader is not just someone with great abilities, but someone who has a positive impact on a great number of people. In the final analysis, it is not your personal resume but your legacy that determines your greatness.

Now, apply these twelve criteria to the current presidential candidates—with ten as the perfect score for each leadership characteristic and zero as the lowest score. Who will come out best on these leadership measures? Hillary Clinton or

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Barack Obama? Rudy Giuliani or John McCain?

More importantly, measure your own leadership as a parent, a teacher, or a leader in your church or organization. What is your strongest quality? What is your weakest link? What areas offer the best hope for improvement?

It is never easy to be a leader, but someone has to do the leading in most situations. This world will become a better place when more people aspire to acquire the characteristics of great leaders.

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# Leadership Accountability

By David H. Holliday, Business Consultant

This article was originally titled “Leadership and Accountability,” but upon reflection I decided that the “and” implied two disparate subjects that are conjoined. Not so.

To be a leader is to assume a role different from the role(s) of those who are followers, and a leader’s role consequently entails *responsibilities* to those followers. This characteristic of leadership has been understood and practiced for centuries, sometimes defined and implemented in excruciating detail.

That a leader might have this burden or obligation to followers did not always mean that accountability resulted. The “Divine Right of Kings,” and their subordinates, conveniently allowed the application of vices alongside virtues, and the former generally prevailed.

## Leadership Responsibilities

Recently, especially in the limelight of these conspicuous corporate scandals, implementation of the Sarbanes-Oxley act, and general changes in social focus, leadership accountability has taken center stage. And, it’s not just about a leader’s being responsible to followers, the people in the leader’s organization. The leader is responsible also for the organization’s activities and both the internal and external effects of its actions.

And therein, I believe, is the crux of the matter: not that accountability needs to be considered part of leadership, but *how* that accountability is perceived and implemented.

Traditionally, businesses as the primary organizational structures today have observed the “letter of the law” not so much by doing good, but refraining from doing bad—although the “bad” was mostly concerned with other business entities (including individuals) in terms of deceit, force, and downright fraud. By maximizing profits, it has been contended, business is helping society directly through creating and distributing wealth and incidentally through self-interest.

## Being Proactive

Further, when something occurs that is strongly disapproved of by stakeholders, including the public, the traditional approach has been reactive: the terms “downplay,” “cover-up,” “distance ourselves,” and “golden parachute” have all become familiar terms for not being accountable. This attitude is not good enough these days; “proactive” is the term on people’s lips when discussing two highly visible aspects of accountability: “What are *You* doing to other people?” and “What are *You* doing to the environment?”

Actually, those are trick questions, but delight the people who ask them. When business leaders respond by denying any “doing” that is bad, the implication is that either we’re “not doing” anything good or, worse, we’re indecisive—not a good image for those of us claiming to be leaders.

By far the most conspicuous of these two questions is the one concerning the environment. Although the impact on individuals may be severe, it’s often felt only locally rather than globally. An organization, however, can wreak environmental damage on a large scale simply because the organization has access to tools and materials capable of doing so. It’s frequently not even apparent that an impact on the environment has occurred and is negative until long after the event that caused it has occurred. Who’s now responsible? In other words, where does the accountability lie?

## Demonstrating Accountability

To what lengths must a leader go to demonstrate accountability? Besides the conspicuous things to do and not to do, leaders must actively seek out even the slightest improvement to impacts on people and the environment. This approach, in turn, requires encouraging all members of the organization to do the same, making them leaders as well.

This short article provides more questions than answers, but the alternative—answering them—would require not only a book, but time to see how solutions to



Leaders choose to actively take charge of an organization and reap the benefits of doing so; in turn, they are accountable to all parties

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business-specific questions are identified and (successfully) implemented.

The message is that *leaders choose* to actively take charge of an organization and reap the benefits of doing so; in turn, they are *accountable* to all parties for maximizing the positive impacts and minimizing the negative impacts of the organization, and of

themselves. *All people* can and should be accountable leaders.

**David H. Holliday is an independent business consultant residing in Bellevue, Washington. Known for his process expertise, he may be contacted via e-mail at: [davidh48@comcast.net](mailto:davidh48@comcast.net).**

# Life and Leadership Lessons from Children's Literature

By Connie Miley, Middle Level Coordinator, Ohio Association of Student Councils

Children's books are an outstanding resource for teaching or reinforcing valuable concepts for everyday life as well as qualities for effective leadership. I have found that whether my audience is a group of middle school kids or adult colleagues, I am always able to grab and hold their attention from the first page to the last.

For me, the power of children's literature became evident while attending a conference in Jacksonville, Florida, in 1992. As the closing activity, a man appeared on stage in a nightgown and cap, carrying a teddy bear, and proceeded to sit down in a rocking chair. The house lights were dimmed, and a single spotlight shone on the man as he picked up a book from the small table sitting beside him. Instrumental music began playing softly in the background, and he read the title, *The Polar Express*. For the next 10 minutes or so, a room filled with nearly 500 adults sat motionless and completely enthralled by the story of the little boy who took a magical train ride that taught him to always believe. When the story concluded, each of us received a small silver jingle bell tied on a piece of yarn as the man reminded all of us that we are the lucky ones who can still hear the bell ringing ... that we haven't stopped believing. I went to a bookstore the very next day and purchased my own copy of *The Polar Express*, and thus began my collection of children's literature, which now includes over 100 books.

## Making the Most of the Moment

From my experience that night in Jacksonville, I learned that with the necessary preparation, the simple act of reading a children's book can make a significant impact. Here are some suggestions that will help you make the most of the moment.

- Be comfortable and confident with your reading of the book. Don't assume that, since it's a children's book, there will not be challenging words. This can especially be true of many Dr. Seuss books. Read through

the book aloud as many times as necessary for you to be sure of your delivery.

- The atmosphere of the room is important. Lighting, seating, and sound must all be taken into consideration.
- Props can be effective, but be sure they *enhance* the environment and/or the story and that they will not interfere with your presentation.
- Background music adds a great deal, but you should be careful to select something that will set the tone you wish. Instrumental movie soundtracks provide some wonderful options. Two of my favorites are *The Forrest Gump Suite* and *Casper's Lullaby* from *Casper*. Also, be sure you practice reading the story with the music so that timing is in sync. Finally, make sure the music doesn't overpower your voice. It is important that volume levels be tested before your presentation.
- Unless you are reading to a small audience, don't bother trying to show the pictures. It is disruptive to the flow of the story and they won't be seen, anyway.
- Some sort of small token that corresponds to the book is a great way to make sure your point is remembered. Plan ahead in determining how these will be distributed so as not to cause a disruption. Be creative. The tokens don't have to be costly or time consuming ... but they will be treasured. I still have my jingle bell necklace hanging in my bedroom.
- Be sure to decide how you will process the story and be prepared for that. Your comments should be brief and to the point, but don't overlook any of the lessons to be gleaned from the story.

I have spent many hours in the children's section of bookstores, simply looking for the next book to add to my collection. Following is a partial list of



A room filled with nearly 500 adults sat motionless and completely enthralled by the story of the little boy who took a magical train ride that taught him to always believe.

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those I have successfully incorporated into my workshops and seminars.

There is an old adage that states, "There's no need to reinvent the wheel." These books have already been written and are just waiting to be used. They offer a fun, creative, and

widely appealing method to help you make a point. They may have been originally written for children, but they contain lessons and concepts we can (and should) practice throughout our lives.

Happy reading!

Title	Author	Theme
<i>Big Sneeze, The</i>	Ruth Brown	Small Actions, Big Effects
<i>Charlie the Caterpillar</i>	Dom De Luise	Friendship
<i>Crayon Box That Talked, The</i>	Shane DeRolf	Acceptance, Tolerance
<i>Eagle's Gift, The</i>	Rafe Martin	Joy, Appreciation, Family, Community
<i>Giraffes Can't Dance</i>	Giles Andrede	Dreams, Inspiration, Self-Esteem
<i>Giving Tree, The</i>	Shel Silverstein	Giving, Generosity
<i>God Bless the Gargoyles</i>	Dav Pilskey	Acceptance, Tolerance, Security
<i>Guess How Much I Love You</i>	Sam McBratney	Unconditional Love, Security
<i>How Leo Learned to Be King</i>	Marcus Pfister	Leadership
<i>I Knew You Could</i>	Craig Dorfman	Achievement, Recognition, Inspiration
<i>I Love You the Purplest</i>	Barbara M. Joesse	Unconditional Love, Self-Esteem, Individuality
<i>Kissing Hand, The</i>	Audrey Penn	Love, Security
<i>Laura's Star</i>	Klaus Baumgart	Friendship, Giving, Sharing
<i>Love You Forever</i>	Robert Munsch	Unconditional Love
<i>No Matter What</i>	Debi Gliori	Unconditional Love
<i>Oh, the Places You'll Go</i>	Dr. Seuss	Achievement, Recognition, Inspiration
<i>Polar Express, The</i>	Chris Van Allsburg	Faith, Belief, Dreams
<i>Prayer for the Twenty-First Century</i>	John Marsden	Hope, Faith
<i>Rainbow Fish to the Rescue</i>	Marcus Pfister	Acceptance, Tolerance, Friendship
<i>Rainbow Fish, The</i>	Marcus Pfister	Friendship, Giving, Sharing
<i>Sylvester and the Magic Pebble</i>	William Steig	Be Yourself
<i>Velveteen Rabbit, The</i>	Michael Hague	Unconditional Love
<i>What Newt Could Do for Turtle</i>	Jonathan London	Friendship, Self-Esteem
<i>Why Christmas Trees Aren't Perfect</i>	Richard H. Schneider	Friendship, Giving, Sharing
<i>Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge</i>	Mem Fox	Memories, Friendship
<i>Yay, You! Moving Out, Moving Up, Moving On</i>	Sandra Boynton	Achievement, Recognition, Inspiration
<i>Yertle the Turtle</i>	Dr. Seuss	Leadership

# Women Expand Their Managerial Role in the Farm Business

By Julia Nolan Woodruff, Extension Educator, Agriculture & Natural Resources and Community Development, Ohio State University Extension, Ashland County

The apron-clad farm wife of our grandmother's era is a woman of the past. Farm women's major responsibilities are no longer cooking for the men, caring for the household and children, and running errands. Although these are still important responsibilities that many farm women include on their "to do list," their role in the operation of the family farm has greatly expanded over the years.

Many women fulfill the role of farm accountant, commodity marketer, and human resource manager. Women also add manual labor tasks, such as feeding livestock, caring for young stock, and milking cows to their list of farm activities. Machinery operation is also found on many of their lists as well. Women often enter these roles with no formal training and in some cases no previous farm experience.

Off-farm employment has been increasingly important to the bottom line of many farm households. According to a survey of 1,209 Illinois farm families enrolled in the Illinois Farm Business Farm Management Association, family living expenses averaged \$52,743 in 2005. Over half of the family living expenses are contributed by off-farm employment. In many cases, it is the farm wife who works away from the farm. Thus, she plays a much different role in support of the family farm as compared to the past. Her off-farm employment not only adds a significant contribution to the family's income, but often provides health insurance coverage for the family. Both are vital aspects to many family farm businesses.

## Women as Primary Farm Operators

Another trend that has been identified is the growing number of women who are the primary operators of the farm. The 2002 Census of Agriculture found the number of female operators in Ohio had increased by almost 30 percent from 1997 to 2002. The increase of women in managerial roles is actually higher, because the census numbers don't include the number

of women who are part of a management team. More women have assumed this position for a variety of reasons. For example, some women have taken responsibility through inheritance, either from parents or a spouse, more young girls are encouraged to consider farming as a career, and others have chosen farming as a second career after retirement. Women are more often primary operators of smaller farms that are fruit and vegetable or livestock-based operations.

As a result of an increase in the number of women in farm managerial roles and other agricultural professions, a need has been recognized throughout the United States to provide more agricultural programming geared toward women. That need has been answered by several states through women in agriculture organizations, conferences, and/or web sites that contain a wealth of information.

## Annie's Project

Programming has been developed to not only target women's educational needs related to their roles within the farm business, but to also create a network of support for women involved in the world of agriculture. Annie's Project is a program that has achieved this mission quite well over the past few years. It began in Illinois and spread throughout the Midwest reaching over 2,000 women in nine states since 2003. Ohio and Oklahoma were added to the list during the winter of 2007.

Annie's Project was held in Wood and Delaware counties this past winter. The classes were filled to capacity with 47 women completing the course. Everyone who completed the class had positive comments to share on their final evaluation. One participant from Delaware County commented, "This class has opened my eyes to a new side of farming and encouraged me to take a bigger role in our operation." Another Delaware participant continued, "This class will enable me to help the farm be more profitable now that I understand how to take



The 2002 Census of Agriculture found the number of female operators in Ohio had increased by almost 30 percent from 1997 to 2002.

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LeadershipLink

care of the paperwork." A Wood County participant said, "I believe these classes made us realize the importance of taking care of insurance, liability and working on marketing besides just concentrating on planting and harvesting."

Women play an important role in the family farm business and Annie's Project will help them improve their management and communication skills. Specific topics include the following: financial record keeping, understanding basic financial statements, financial management tools, goal setting and mission statement writing, commodity marketing basics, crop insurance, family communication, retirement planning, and learning about individual personality types and characteristics through the Real Colors program. The class also provides the opportunity for women to network with other women

in similar situations and to learn from one another.

The class meets one evening a week for six consecutive weeks, and will take place in six Ohio counties in the winter of 2008. The Ohio Annie's Project is a result of funding by a North Central Risk Management Education Center grant. The host counties for 2008 include: Ashland, Ashtabula, Auglaize, Defiance, Erie, and Wood.

The registration fee is \$60 and class space is limited. For registration information, contact the host county or project coordinators: Doris Herringshaw (OSU Extension Educator, Wood County) at 419-354-9050 and Julia Woodruff (OSU Extension Educator, Ashland County) at 419-281-8242.

# Leading with Character: Stories of Valor and Virtue and the Principles They Teach

by John Sosik

Reviewed by Debbie Blanton, Penn State University

Charismatic leadership—including the power to exert strong influence on others—has been studied extensively, but a Penn State Great Valley researcher says there has been little attention paid to authentic leadership, particularly the substance of leadership, including values, virtues, and character strengths, that are at the core of truly great authentic leaders.

“When developing a course for the master of leadership development program at Penn State Great Valley graduate school, I found that the media tended to focus a great deal on charisma, but I could not find much on the virtues and character strengths as applied to authentic leaders,” said John J. Sosik, professor of management and organization, and author of a new book, *Leading with Character: Stories of Valor and Virtue and the Principles They Teach*.

“Right now, with all the attention paid to Enron and other phoniness in business, people need to know what the authentic leader stands for in terms of his or her virtues and character. When what you say is what you do and you’re true to yourself, then you are an authentic leader.”

## Personification of Character

Sosik took a novel approach to illustrate 23 principles of leading with character strengths and virtues, using well-known individuals who personify each. Some are obvious—the courage of Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks, the humanity of Princess Diana, the patience and commitment of Nelson Mandela. Others are subtle and not the expected leadership types—TV’s Andy Griffith, poet Maya Angelou, and NFL star-turned-Army-recruit Pat Tillman. Through these latter examples, Sosik made people realize that good leaders do not have to be saints, and they do not have to be people elected to high office.

What makes the book particularly interesting is the varied lineup of people

featured—from spiritual leaders Mother Teresa and Pope John Paul II to musicians Brian Wilson and Johnny Cash to highly successful business people Herb Kelleher, Anita Roddick, and Warren Buffet, to children’s television legend Mr. Rogers. The book includes more than two dozen profiles of leaders of character.

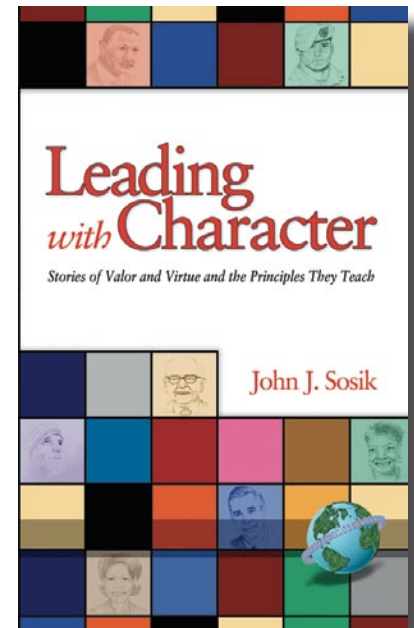
“Mr. Rogers is not your typical charismatic leader, but he tried to take every child and make them feel special, building the self-esteem that is critical for child development and also critical for business leaders in empowering their associates,” said Sosik. “Brian Wilson proved that even when you’re at the height of your creative success, you must innovate. His critically acclaimed album with the Beach Boys, *Pet Sounds*, was very innovative, and it raised the bar for the Beatles, who went on to do the classic *Sergeant Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*. The same is true with companies like General Electric, which has always been highly innovative.”

## Charisma and Authenticity

While charismatic leadership, or the ability to craft and deliver a message or vision to inspire followers, is incredibly powerful in spurring followers to help fulfill organizational objectives, authentic leaders who provide an accurate picture of who they are and what they stand for and who lead by example are able to elicit great loyalty among those who share similar values. Those who are able to combine the best of charisma and authenticity can become transformational leaders of the highest order and carry their organizations and followers to the greatest heights.

“Joe Namath is a fine example of someone who led with absolute conviction and authenticity,” said Sosik. “When he came to the Jets there was some racial unrest in society and on the team, but

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Sosik, J. J. (2006). *Leading with character: Stories of valor and virtue and the principles they teach*. Charleston, NC: Information Age Publishing.



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he made it clear in no uncertain terms that the team needed to be united if the team was to be successful. Namath knew what he stood for and also knew what he would not stand for. Super Bowl III was the result of his authentic transformational leadership and the way he inspired

his teammates to work together for a common purpose.”

Contact: Debbie Blanton, [dyb5@psu.edu](mailto:dyb5@psu.edu)

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<http://www.personal.psu.edu/jjs20>

When what you say is  
what you do and  
you're true to yourself,  
then you are an  
authentic leader.

## Organizational Culture and Leadership, 3rd ed.

**Edgar H. Schein, 2004, San Francisco:**  
**Jossey-Bass**

Schein updates his influential understanding of culture—what it is, how it is created, how it evolves, and how it can be changed. Offers new information on the topic of occupational cultures, and demonstrates the crucial role leaders play in successfully applying the principles of culture to achieve organizational goals. Also tackles the complex question of how an existing culture can be changed.

## Value Leadership: The 7 Principles that Drive Corporate Value in Any Economy

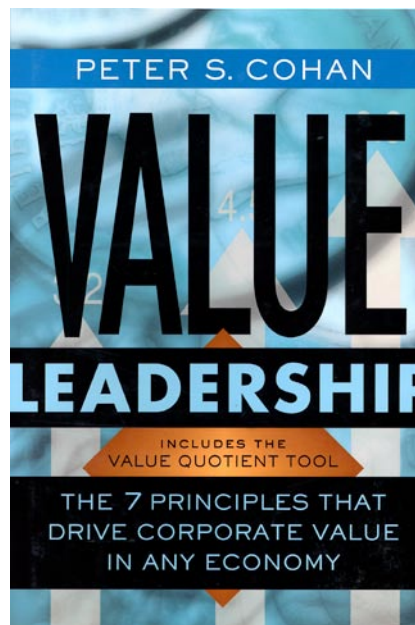
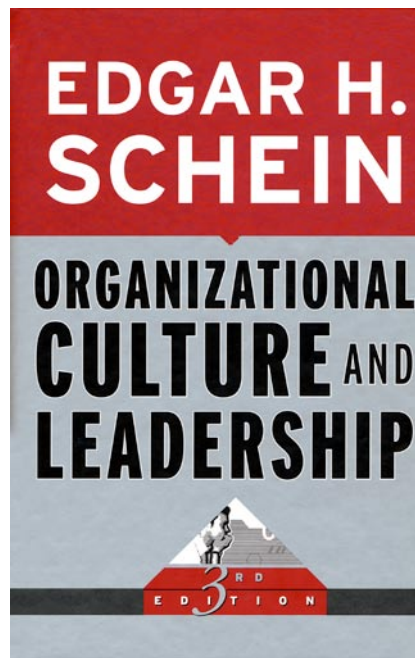
**Peter S. Cohan, 2003, San Francisco:**  
**Jossey-Bass**

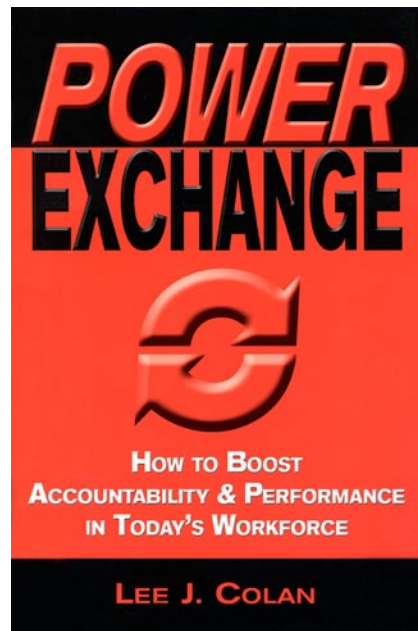
With consumers and investors losing confidence in corporate America, executives are under heightened pressure to perform. As the risk of failure grows ever greater, executives scramble for solid principles to help them prosper. If you are an executive, you want to know how to create higher levels of value for your employees, customers, and communities. You want to power your organization to superior profitability in bad times and good. These principles are: valuing human relationships, fostering teamwork, experimenting frugally, fulfilling your commitments, fighting complacency, winning through multiple means, and giving to your community.

## 75 e-learning Activities: Making Online Learning Interactive

**Ryan Watkins, 2005, San Francisco:**  
**Pfeiffer**

Provides e-learning activities that can be used to increase interactivity, engage learners, accomplish learning objectives, develop online relationships, promote active learning, and create learning communities.





## Power Exchange: How to Boost Accountability & Performance in Today's Workforce

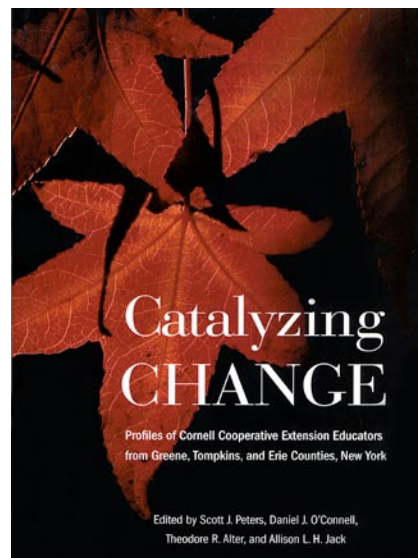
Lee J. Colan, 2005, Dallas: CornerStone Leadership Institute

Today's changing workforce requires powerful leadership. Unlike yesterday's leaders, today's leaders must exchange their employee power for employee performance. A power exchange yields a highly engaged team whether you lead full- or part time employees. Any leader can use the four simple power converters to boost accountability and performance in today's workforce.

## Catalyzing Change: Profiles of Cornell Cooperative Extension Educators from Greene, Tompkins, and Erie Counties, New York

Ed. Scott J. Peters, Daniel J. O'Connell, Theodore R. Alter, and Allison L. H. Jack, 2006, Cornell University

This book is an excellent read for persons working in any aspect of education or community enhancement. It provides tremendous insight into the passion behind the work and the immeasurable value of human interaction.



## The Servant Leader: Transforming Your Heart, Head, Hands, & Habits

Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges, 2003, Nashville, TN: J. Countryman

A resource that focuses on individual and self leadership prior to the understanding of group leadership. Business leaders come to realize that teams are more powerful than the sum of the individuals and to recognize their people as appreciating assets. The Servant Leader summarizes the Four Dimensions of Leadership: the head (leadership assumptions and methods), the hands (application and leadership behavior), the heart (edging God out), and the habits (solitude, prayer, study of scripture, unconditional love, etc.).

