

What Leaders Are Saying About This Book

In this wise and exceptionally practical book, Michael Farlow reminds us of an often overlooked truth: Leadership is just like a muscle; the more we exercise it, the stronger we get. Read one chapter from this book each week and invest time answering the thoughtful questions Michael poses. Then act on the excellent suggestions accompanying each chapter. Within a very short amount of time, you will definitely be a better leader.

John Ryan, President & CEO, Center for Creative Leadership

Leaders are Made Not Born is a realistic and thought-provoking look at the leadership skills needed to bring the very best out of one's self and others. Practical and credible, Dr. Farlow's teachings work to create a work environment filled with engaged individuals working collaboratively as a team. The book masterfully closes the gap between theory and operations and vibrantly brings leadership methodologies to life. Anyone interested in learning how people can surpass their individual goals—with the greater good of the corporate, or nonprofit, entity an even higher priority—will want to read this book.

Debra A. Canales, CAO, Trinity Health

Whether you are a leader today or planning to be one someday, this highly readable book presents concepts, strategies, questions, examples, and motivation to hone and/or develop the skills of effective leadership. Applicable to both professional and personal lives, to government or private sector, to large corporations or small businesses, to men or women, to small team leaders or CEOs, this is a must read for those who desire to reach their full potential by leading others to reach theirs.

Alan L. Krause, Executive VP, ATK-Composite Optics, retired

More About What Leaders Are Saying

Leaders Are Made Not Born by Dr. Michael Farlow is a transformative road map for established and relatively new leaders who want to advance to their highest leadership potential. This is a timeless guidebook with practical instructions outlined to help expand your knowledge and accelerate your growth in various aspects of traditional and modern leadership styles and methodologies. The author's ability to provide golden nuggets from great literature, real-life examples, and research data is the structural framework that provides valuable lessons built to last. Without reservations or hesitations, I highly recommend this book.

TJ Haygood, Founder/CEO, Confidential Search Solutions

Written from a unique perspective based on experience, Dr. Farlow captures the most important skills to develop in leaders. *Leaders Are Made Not Born* is an easy-to-understand, and quick-reading guide which offers common situations then suggests thoughtful questions for consideration. I particularly enjoyed reading the skill descriptions, then reviewing the suggestions at the end of each section. Dr. Farlow not only offers practical leadership skills, but provides a reflective process to personalize your objective and add a sense of ownership and empowerment.

Sandi J. Wolff, Vice President of Education, KLRN

LEADERS
are MADE
NOT BORN

*40 Simple Skills
to Make You the Leader
You Want to Be*

Michael J. Farlow, PhD

Leaders *are* Made Not Born
40 Simple Skills to Make You the Leader You Want to Be

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In Memory of

Richard L. Henderson, EdD
Teacher, Mentor, Friend

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INTRODUCTION

The Problem

“Lead: to show the way by going in advance; conduct; escort; direct.”

“Manage: to exert control over; make submissive to one’s authority, discipline, or persuasion.”

—American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language

“You manage things; you lead people.”

—Grace Murray Hopper

Industry in general and especially high-technology industries are not developing or employing leaders.
Managers are not necessarily leaders.

Recently, I had the opportunity to reflect on leadership, or the lack of it, in the high-technology sector of the business world in which I have been working for some time. My focus was on a few companies that are now suffering because their current managers and executives have never learned the art of leadership. These managers have progressed from technical proficiency to supervisory roles in which they manage people. Unfortunately, however technically gifted, most of these managers haven’t a clue about how to marshal and engage their employees. The regrettable fallout is that too many of them

ultimately lose their jobs because they cannot lead others in achieving organizational goals.

Leadership is the highest form of the art of dealing with people and something more advanced than management. A leader is a person who carefully balances the needs of the organization with the needs of its human resources. A leader not only wants the company to be successful but also wants the people who work for the company to learn, advance, and prosper. A leader must have a vision for the organization and play a proactive role in bringing that vision to fruition.

As I have suggested, however, the ability to meet these requirements is not adequately fostered in many organizations. More often, technicians and individual contributors are promoted into management roles for which they have not been trained and are ill suited, despite individual and executive management's feelings to the contrary.

Aside from studies and research, I have witnessed engineers and other professionals

- who pursue their own technical agendas without regard for team members
- who cannot mentor or accept change
- whose ethics too often place the company in danger
- who have a complete lack of understanding of a performance review system
- who call meetings that mostly end without resolution
- who seek an elusive consensus in lieu of making a decision

If you think this is only a high-tech issue, think again. I have learned from academicians and business colleagues alike that this is all too often the case in most other business categories as well.

It is my hope that this book can save your job and open the doors to more successful career outcomes for you and

others. Perhaps you are wondering, “How could I lose my job? After all, the company put me here because it felt I deserved it and am capable!” The truth is that companies are as much at fault for their managers’ failures as are the individual managers. So, being selected for a management or leadership position does not necessarily mean you are ready for it. The senior managers and executives who run companies often make terrible people decisions. Why? Because they suffer from the same poor understanding of people and perpetuate the cycle by failing to recognize that technical and operational skills are not enough.

Right now, I am aware of several very senior managers in two large companies who are about to lose their jobs. Bob is the general manager of a billion-dollar-plus business unit. He was something of a child prodigy and has become a brilliant technician. He knows the business and understands the entire infrastructure (P&L, metrics, forecasting). However, he cannot and does not communicate his needs and views to his direct reports. His vision, if he has one, is unarticulated. He cannot bring himself to confront his employees and tell them that their performance is lacking and how they might improve. In other words, his inability to work with people (a basic tenet of leadership) has him handcuffed and keeps him from meeting his business goals, to say nothing of the goals of his people.

His direct reports, in fact, are holding private meetings among themselves to try and solve the problems he is ignoring. The company does not recognize that it made a mistake nor will it try to help him. Instead, he will be “pushed aside,” perhaps given a less substantive job in the company, “encouraged” to retire, or terminated outright. No matter which choice is made, this person’s life and the lives of his family members are going to drastically change for reasons that could have been avoided.

Brent is a senior vice president in another multibillion-dollar company. While Brent does not come from the high-technology sector, most of his operational experience directly applies to the company for which he now works. The culture of the new company is more “liberal” than those he has experienced before. However, as the former CEO of several smaller organizations, he has grown to see himself as a “director” of people and things. He relies on his own point of view; gives strong, general direction; and assumes that his direct reports will inherently understand the details. He seldom leaves his office and relies on his direct reports to keep him briefed. What Brent fails to realize is that his employees understand neither the details he has in mind nor exactly how to make them happen.

Early on, they tried to tell him how his approach might not work in his new company’s environment, but he ignored them. They now tell him what they think he wants to hear or what they want him to hear, but do what they want to do. As a result, Brent is virtually detached from his group and is losing control to other divisions, which already have drafted plans to assume more than half of his area of responsibility. His continued employment is now in jeopardy because he has failed to adapt a leadership posture for success. Once again, the group of senior managers who placed him in his present position will not help him because they do not see or appreciate his lack of leadership skills.

These are two real examples in which a lack of leadership in the company has resulted in employment fatality (Brent is now gone). They are senior management examples for a reason. They show that leadership is lacking at the top levels and that little to no help is provided by the corporate structure. It doesn’t take much deduction to realize that, if the top levels are lacking, so are the lower-level positions.

But wait; there’s more. Current human resources data suggest that the cost to a company for losing a valued employee is about

three times that person's base salary. One of the vice presidents (VPs) I mentioned earlier is in the \$250K range, which means that the cost to the company of letting him go (severance, recruiting a replacement, continuity loss, etc.) will be around \$750K. A midrange employee in the \$85K bracket would represent a \$255K loss when he departs. In either case, the lost dollars represent big bucks, especially when combined with multiple personnel losses in the same year. What amazes me is that companies are apparently willing to accept these losses (or are unaware of the total), rather than investing \$10K, \$25K, or even \$50K in coaching and leadership development to retain otherwise great technical talent. On this basis alone, companies should be developing their leadership talent as a means of increasing their overall human resource ROI.

Born to be what you want to be

“Leaders are made, they are not born. They are made by hard effort, which is the price which all of us must pay to achieve any goal that is worthwhile.” —Vince Lombardi

“The most dangerous leadership myth is that leaders are born — that there is a genetic factor to leadership. This myth asserts that people simply either have certain charismatic qualities or not. That’s nonsense; in fact, the opposite is true. Leaders are made rather than born.” —Warren G. Bennis

Contrary to many opinions, leaders do not spring from a genetically determined mold. They are developed over time with lots of practice.

Not so many years ago, a CEO I was working with told me with great certainty that leaders are born, not made—that, in some

fashion, they are “hardwired” with the basic skills to lead and lead effectively. I realized he was not alone in his opinion. This was never my view, but at the time, I was not very skilled at articulating or arguing my point. Now, however, I am pleased to say I can do a better job.

After reading Daniel Goleman’s bestselling book, *Emotional Intelligence*, and the work of Dr. Joseph LeDoux of New York University, I had a number of questions related to the human brain. Those questions led to reading more and writing the following article I am planning to publish. The article is more formal than the rest of this book but one I hope will encourage you to continue on your leadership path with positive anticipation.

“Most Americans have probably heard a million times that, in this country, you can be or do anything you want (within the judicial system and the laws of physics). Usually this is followed by the caveat: as long as you work hard at it. Over time many of us have probably said, “Sure, if you have the money and contacts,” or “Sure, if you have the right genetic capabilities,” or “Sure, if you are young enough.” The truth is that, barring selected physical disabilities, neuroscience has shown us and continues to show us that none of these excuses is a major restriction to achieving the things you really want, like being a leader.

“It is estimated that the vast majority of us have brains that are not restricted by any physiological impediments or deformities. In simple terms, that means that for the majority of us, there are no mental limitations to achieving the success that we want. The key word is *want* to the extent that it means “true desire.” To our disadvantage and over time, we have commonly believed that success is based on “gifts” that certain people have from birth. For example, we hear, ‘He is a born leader,’ or ‘She is a born

musician,' or 'They are really gifted.' The truth is that there are no 'gifts,' nor are we born to be anything specific. There is no leadership gene just as there is no pianist gene or management gene. That is not to say that genes are irrelevant; they are not. The purpose of our approximately 25,000 human genes is to produce amino acids, which in turn produce proteins in sequences that the Human Genome Project has identified. These protein generators are the basis of our human physical development (skeletal, neurologic, etc.) as well as the creation of certain biochemical reactions required for growth, learning, memory, maintenance, and function.

"In his book, *The Genius in All of Us*, David Shenk tells us that talent is not a gift but a process. He terms this process interactionism . . . the interaction between genes and environment, with environment being a major factor in the process. In support, geneticists Eva Jablonka and Marion Lamb (*Evolution in Four Dimensions*) confirm the view that the gene is not a simple causal agent in human development always producing the same effect. There is no gene for traits such as adventurousness, shyness, stupidity, etc. Instead, most genes are versatile, able to produce a variety of biochemical products (proteins) depending on context and induced by environmental factors. Even Nobel Prize-winning neuroscientist and psychologist Eric Kandel (*In Search of Memory*) notes, ". . . even though I had long been taught that the genes of the brain are the governors of behavior, the absolute masters of our fate, our work showed that, in the brain as in bacteria, genes are also servants of the environment."

"Prime influences in achieving the success you want are desire, training, and practice. Achieving great success is never easy; it takes dedication and self-motivation to stay

on track and endure the pain and failures that go along with development. This means strong, enduring desire . . . enough to continue to push yourself through the process. Training includes education, coaching, and mentoring. New skills and capabilities seldom come to us from the blue. To achieve new levels of development we need the wisdom, the skill, and the experience of others to give us direction. Practice or repetition is the final major key to success. Repetition in the learning process results in the production proteins, which stimulate the growth of synaptic paths to long-term memory and, therefore, the development of multiple new capabilities. Schenk gives several examples of famous, successful people who were thought of as gifted or born experts.

“One was Mozart, the famous ‘gifted’ musician and composer. Most of us think of Mozart as a genius, a born musician. However, as it turns out, the major portions of his success can be attributed to desire, skilled training, and lots of practice. At an extremely early age, young Mozart sat on the bench of his sister’s piano, which she learned to play under the disciplined eye of her father, Leopold. When Mozart was three, Leopold decided to include his young son in the same training process as his older sister. Lessons and practice were intense every day, and the process created a highly technical player, though not as good as skilled adult musicians. Mozart is remembered for creating his first composition just short of his fifth birthday. However, it was a small piece (a scherzo) and a rearrangement of the work of another composer. By the time he was thirteen (ten years after starting his daily practice), Mozart was on tour with his sister playing to royalty and notables throughout Europe. The main draw was the novelty of two siblings whose mechanical skill was seemingly so advanced. As an adult,

Mozart placed more focus on composing, where he achieved his long-term fame.

“The message here is that a great musician was exposed to music at an early age. He was motivated by his family’s musical environment and his desire to be part of it. Perhaps the greatest key to his success was practice, ten years of it for three or more hours a day. That amounts to approximately 10,000 hours of practice. Eric Kandel also cites a major reason for Mozart’s and others’ success as practice, practice, practice.

“It is important to note that the development of new capabilities and the achievement of new levels of success are not limited by age. Kandel and other neuroscientists tell us that our brains continue to change and adapt over time, even into old age. The term involved is *neuroplasticity*, the ability of the brain to reorganize itself by forming new neural connections throughout life. While our learning processes are at their best in our childhood years, the brain retains the ability to alter itself, learn, and store memories throughout our lives. Therefore, we can continue to learn and change regardless of age. The older we are, the more work is required, but the growth of neural connections and changes in the brain continue.

“So, assuming that you fall into the category of most humans with well-functioning brains, you can be virtually anything you want—with desire, education/training, and lots of practice. Most of us are, indeed, born to be what we really want to be.”

What follows is a leadership guide based on my thirty-plus years of experience in the business world, as well as my own study and research. The guide offers quick, easy, and illustrative

examples of the basic nature of leadership so that you don't have to sift through confusing and competing theories in order to apply these insights in a practical way. The audiences for this book are both those new to leadership and those who are relatively old hands, or as one early draft reader put it: "I see it as a handbook for someone just starting out in business or for the chairman of the board."

The book is divided into two parts. The first contains thirty-three specific guidelines to improve your leadership skills; the second deals with the importance of people in your organization.

Each chapter begins with a brief leadership-related discussion, followed by a real-life example (names changed to protect privacy). After each example I have included a series of introspective questions designed for those new to the concepts of leadership to foster the thinking process. If you are an "old hand" at leadership and your time is short, you may wish to skip them. Finally, each chapter ends with a series of suggestions designed to enhance or improve your leadership skills.

Having been in operations for most of my life, however, I know that the adult professional is eager to see what works right up front without having to plow through thousands of words. I hope the lessons you learn will not only help you retain your job but also the jobs of valued employees and, by extension, decrease costs to your company in the long run. The great side benefit is that this book will help you develop better men and women who are able to contribute to their families and the communities in which they live.

Enjoy the book, and put the skills it contains into practice.

PART 1

SKILL 1

Be Willing to Stand Up and Be a Leader

“All of the great leaders have had one characteristic in common: it was the willingness to confront unequivocally the major anxiety of their people in their time. This, and not much else, is the essence of leadership.” —John Kenneth Galbraith

“You can only lead others where you yourself are willing to go.”
—Lachlan McLean

Being a leader is wanting to make a difference and being willing to help people achieve personal and organization goals.

As I suggested earlier, you have to want or be compelled to be a leader. No amount of badgering or cajoling or training will make it happen. That means you are willing to take charge, to not just be the “boss” but also to achieve the combined needs and goals of your team, company, or organization. Most of us are familiar with our various company needs, but you may also be asking yourself, “Does he mean that I should take an active part in my employees’ lives, both

professionally and privately?” Simply put, yes. If you don’t have this basic desire, you will not be a true leader. You may be a driver of people and a manager of things, but success will elude you. If you look around when the hard work comes, you will see few if any dedicated followers behind you.

Example

Sean was the new leader/supervisor of a design group of engineers. He was happy about the promotion because it came with a substantial pay raise. Truth be known, he was promoted because of his technical knowledge more than anything else. What Sean failed to consider when seeking and assuming the new position was the added responsibility and duties. Faced with the need to provide leadership to the team and develop the other engineers, he found he had no interest in doing either. Instead, he continued to work on designs and assumed that everyone else could take care of themselves. After all, they were all adults. He provided no guidance; he did nothing to keep the engineers apprised of what was going on in the company or division; and rather than helping engineers improve and advance, he saw them as potential competitors for his job. He was harsh when deadlines were not met and said nothing when they were. He purposely focused on the work, mostly his own, and ignored human needs and wants around him.

As one might guess, the performance of his unit declined dramatically and, despite warnings or counseling from above, Sean did nothing positive to correct the problem. He did get harsher with the engineers and even made threats of firing, but to no avail. In fact, several members of the team quit or sought transfers, leaving the section short-handed. In the end Sean himself was fired for lack of performance.

Questions

1. Why do you think Sean failed?
2. Think of an instance when you have witnessed the lack of desire to lead that yielded a failure. What were the circumstances? What was the outcome?
3. Think of a time when you might have observed a person declining a leadership role in favor of continuing to do what he or she was doing. Why do you think he or she made that choice?
4. What do you think Sean's life would be like now if he had declined the promotion?
5. What should the company have done before promoting Sean to the new position?

Suggestions

1. If you have been offered a promotion, ask yourself the following questions:
 - a) Do I really want this promotion?
 - b) Does this job fit with the vision of my career and/or life I have established for myself?
 - c) Can I accept responsibility for my actions and, more importantly, those of the people I will lead?
 - d) Am I willing to accept risk? (Read more about risk in Skill #13, Accept Risk.)
 - e) Do I believe that developing people is a major part of being a leader?
 - f) Can I devote whatever time and energy is necessary to the job?

LEADERS ARE MADE NOT BORN

2. If you answered “no” to one or more of the above questions, stop to ask yourself what this tells you before accepting the position.