



# The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations

*James M. Kouzes, Barry Z. Posner*

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The 25th anniversary edition of the bestselling business classic, completely revised and updatedFor more than 25 years, "The Leadership Challenge" has been the most trusted source on becoming a better leader, selling more than 2 million copies in over 20 languages since its first publication. Based on Kouzes and Posner's extensive research, this all-new edition casts their enduring work in context for today's world, proving how leadership is a relationship that must be nurtured, and most importantly, that it can be learned.Features over 100 all-new case studies and examples, which show The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership in action around the worldFocuses on the toughest organizational challenges leaders face todayAddresses changes in how people work and what people want from their work

An indispensable resource for leaders at all levels, this anniversary edition is a landmark update and must-read.

## **The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations Details**

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## **From Reader Review The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations for online ebook**

### **Tom says**

Kouzes, James, and Barry Posner (1987, 1995, 2002, 2007, 2012), *The Leadership Challenge*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA. A very readable, well-researched, and practical book about leadership, now in its fourth edition. It includes interesting insights about what followers expect of their leaders, and rich descriptions of how to accomplish the five leadership challenges in contemporary organizations: challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modeling the way, and encouraging the heart. Head and shoulders above dozens of books I've read on leadership since 1972, including a raft of recent ones. The authors run a popular seminar based on the book. They also keep current by publishing new editions, the most recent in 2012. It is really interesting to see what qualities of leaders their followers have most admired over the past 25 years...

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### **Trevor says**

Yet another book on leadership that doesn't really define what leadership is - other than by a series of anecdotes related to people who are presumably successful leaders. The main problem here for me is that it is never clear that the remarkably positive stories being told reflect something other than the story the leaders might want other people to hear or to tell about themselves. As someone who quite likes to read fiction - even if I haven't for far too long - the one thing such reading has taught me is that stories can be dangerous things. They can uncover the truth, highlight it, or they can do as much to hide the truth - they can be incredibly self-serving. And that isn't always just because the person telling the story is nasty in some way. You see, a story demands a narrative arc and that requires a kind of directionality that is often only able to be understood after the event. And we like to shine the best of all possible lights upon ourselves. We don't want to be remembered as fools or nasty. Rather, it is only after the event that we see what felt at the time like false starts were necessary learnings or incremental steps towards ultimate victory. So, when a book is basically a series of happy stories about success - well, I am left more than a little cold.

Central to this book is the idea that leadership is about change. Having worked in too many organisations where change was more or less randomly imposed - or rather, change was something that was about improving the CEOs CV and proving them a 'change leader' than being necessary to the organisation itself - I found this central vision particularly problematic. As soon as someone is convinced that one side of any tension is the only side worth worrying about (change, in this instance) then you just know that 'consolidation' is a trap about to come and bite them on the bum. But if success is something that is ultimately defined by where a leader leads you - then they have to lead you somewhere other than where you currently are - no matter how nice that current place is.

So much of this book was about how great leaders find ways to empower those they are leading. And this is something I also found particularly interesting. Not least because it implies very particular kinds of workplaces - workplaces where there is the opportunity for the majority of the workers to actively contribute to the overall success of the company in potentially innovative ways. Now, overwhelmingly, when this kind of 'leadership as inspiration' was discussed the people being inspired were mostly people at the top levels of the organisation - second-tier managers, that sort of thing. Only once that I can remember was a 'lowest-level staff member' mentioned as someone whose contribution needed to be recognised - and even then only

in a patronising sense - you know, we all need to remember the important job the driver does... Yeah, of course. Though, how this person might contribute to the overall direction of the company wasn't as clear.

The point is that our world is composed of essentially two types of employees. One sort of employee has a series of skills that are costly to reproduce and are not generally available. These employees are often treated remarkably well. Their opinions are highly regarded and they are constantly asked their opinions, the organisation finds as many ways as possible to make the jobs of these employees as pleasant an experience as it can. It offers multiple reward systems, high wages, stock options and god knows what else. The rarity of the skills these employees hold make such considerations essential - and these, I've found, are the types of employees who are mostly discussed in books on leadership like this one – that is, employees the company needs to keep and attract.

However, there are a whole class of other employees who are just as invariably never discussed in books like this - and they are the employees whose jobs face the neo-Taylorism of 'scientific management'. Their jobs are standardised to the point where the employees themselves probably don't even do all of any single job per se. And their jobs are measured to within an inch of their lives. The division of labour enacted upon these people makes much of what they do personally meaningless to the person doing the work and they have no say in the type, pace or quality of the work they do. Often this lack of voice is quite literal - and with the increasing casualisation of employment this is increasingly true - that is, often these employees are 'on call' (yet another 'just in time' resource the real employees of the organisation need to manage) and therefore are never available for workplace meetings – neither invited nor welcome. The fact that books like this never make any mention of such employees presumably implies that leading such people requires no skills at all. And this is probably true. The other uncomfortable fact here is that such jobs are on the increase – in fact, the precariousness of most current employment is precisely due to the increase in these 'gig' jobs. The course of history seems to be pointing toward either the elimination of most jobs through automation or the increasing automation of the jobs that remain so that they become endlessly mindless and deskilled. This is, after all, the path of Capitalism. That books on leadership make no mention of this makes them read more like moral myths that need to be learnt in theory and disregarded in practice.

It is now about a week since I read this book - and I'm struggling to remember any of the little stories here used to justify the 12 of this and the 5 principals of that. I come away from these books basically wanting to hear about Hitler - you know, a counter-example of leader. I want someone to tell me the negative side of leadership and, if it has a negative side, then how might an organisation (or society more generally) go about defending itself from that side of leadership. I also want to hear some discussion of why we need our workplace organisations to be quite so anti-democratic. Why is democracy such a good idea for a nation, but a terrible idea for a company? Are there any examples of democratic organisations that have been successful - oh, I don't know - like cooperatives in the UK or even small family businesses called something like 'I Quattro Fratelli' or something, where there is no 'leader' as such, but rather a more democratic means of making key decisions. The primary assumption is always that what we need is a great leader - but as someone who has watched on in horror at US politics over the last few decades - a nation that has prided itself in laying entire nations to waste (think Vietnam, Cambodia, Iraq...) a nation that spends more on its military than all other nations on the planet combined (I think that is right, but won't even bother checking) and that is currently lead by a madman - then maybe it is time to question putting infinite power into the hands of one person.

And don't get me wrong - Obama was better than the current loon, but only a little better. Before he was elected he spoke of disarming and reducing the US nuclear weapons arsenal. He went on to dedicate something like a trillion dollars to upgrading those very weapons. We really need to rethink 'leadership' in all its forms. It isn't at all clear to me that we have much time left on this planet - our addiction to 'leaving

the big decisions' to 'leaders' seems to be at least part of the problem we face and one that is leading us to our doom.

None of these problems are discussed in any way here - this is, instead, a book on the glories of leadership. It suffers from the simple mindedness you might expect from such a book.

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### **Michael says**

I received more from this book than I could have hoped for. Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner wrote the original version of this book in 1987 but that shouldn't scare you because they are on their 5th edition of this book in which they add new case studies, more interviews with other leaders, and other updates.

Every time I read a book like this I check the credibility of the authors and if you do your own research you'd know that these two are more than credible to write a book on leadership. Whenever I read a book of this kind I check to see if it's research based and not based purely on personal opinion. The book cites study, after study. Like frosting on the cake all of the ideas that they present from the studies and questionnaires are supported by stories of leaders around the globe.

I immediately started using the material presented in this book in my workplace and definitely noticed a difference!

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### **Tina says**

I had to read this as part of a group project (for a class in the nonprofit management certificate program).

While I think this book provides some great ideas and insight for leaders, I think it could be shorter. It's a little repetitive and redundant at times. I don't think it provided me with much information that I hadn't heard before--though some of the examples were nice illustrations.

Honestly, I've just read half of it--and will only read one more chapter (the chapter I'm responsible for presenting to the class). My awesome group members will take care of their chapters and I'll get the key points from them instead of reading 150 pages. This book does not motivate me enough to want to read it all for myself.

I guess this would be a great/useful read for anyone who hasn't been enrolled in a leadership program for five months or has recently started a career in a management/executive position.

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### **Lindsay Bowley says**

A lot of practical application based on research - much different than a John Maxwell type of book

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## **Bruce Flanagan says**

I consider Leadership Challenge by Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner to be the best research-based book ever written in the field of leadership.

What I love about this book is that it is actually written for its readers!

Let's face it--very few readers of business books are CEO's of multi-billion corporations. Yet many business books follow the same over-used formula--interviewing CEOs--talking about what they are doing so well--and suggesting that you do the same thing.

Leadership Challenge is based upon learnings from leaders at all levels--and shows how "regular people" can make a huge, positive difference in their organizations. It is written in a way that can help executives, mid-managers, first-line supervisors, project leaders--and even individual contributors--better understand how they can lead--and be able to immediately apply what they have learned in their work.

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## **Alex Duncan says**

Fun and engaging book on leadership.

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## **Loy Machedo says**

Great Content, Numerous Personalities being Quoted, Very Apt Anecdotes, Easy to Understand Principles and Universal Application is how I would describe what the book 'The Leadership Challenge' is all about.

What is this book about?

### **PART 1**

What Leaders do and What Constituents Expect

1. The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership:
  - 1) Model the way
  - 2) Inspire a shared vision
  - 3) Challenge the process
  - 4) Enable others to act
  - 5) Encourage the heart

### **2. Credibility Is The Foundation of Leadership:**

For people to follow someone willingly, the majority of constituents believe the leader must be honest, forward-looking, inspiring, and competent.

### **PART 2**

Model the Way

3. Clarify Values: Find your voice and affirm shared values.

4. Set the Example: Personify the shared values and teach others to model these values.

### Part 3

Inspire a Shared Vision

5. Envision the Future: Imagine the possibilities and find a common purpose.

6. Enlist Others: Appeal to common ideals and animate the vision.

### Part 4

Challenge the Process

7. Search For Opportunities: Seize the initiative and exercise oversight.

8. Experiment and Take Risks: Generate small wins and learn from experience.

### Part 5

Enable Others to Act

9. Foster Collaboration: Create a climate of trust and facilitate relationships.

10. Strengthen Others: Enhance self-determination and develop competence and confidence.

### Part 6

Encourage the Heart

11. Recognize Contributions: Expect the best and Personalize recognition.

12. Celebrate the Values and Victories: Create a spirit of community and Be personally involved.

### Part 7

Leadership for Everyone

13. Leadership Is Everyone's Business

- You are the most important leader in your organization.

- Leadership is learned.

- Leaders make a difference.

- First lead yourself.

- Moral leadership calls us to high purposes.

- Humility is the antidote to hubris.

- Leadership is in the moment.

- The best-kept secret of successful leaders is love: staying in love with leading, with the people who do the work, with what their organizations produce, and with those who honor the organization by using its products and services.

Overall, A simple yet effective book that describes what Leadership is all about and will always remain a timeless piece of literature in the non-fiction genre.

Overall Rating – 7.5 out of 10

Loy Machedo

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**Jeff says**

When I posted the review on Warren Bennis' "On Leadership", I mentioned that books I had started since I had started Bennis' text had caused me to re-think whether or not I found Bennis' text informative. "The Leadership Challenge" was the book that spurred the re-thinking.

Pretty good insight as to how to become a better leader. Lots of good stories and examples. Many of the tricks they offer are easy to implement - being a better leader is as simple as choosing to be a better leader. This book is built on the fact that leadership can be taught. Its success is built on the fact that anyone can accomplish the extraordinary.

My only caution with the text is that it contains too many lists. It starts with the "five practices of exemplary leadership", then offers two ways to achieve each of the five practices, three activities that you can take to accomplish the two ways to achieve the five practices, and so on. While all of the advice is resonant, it is virtually impossible to remember all the lists.

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### **Michael says**

This is a good leadership book. I am tempted to give it a five after reading the last chapter, but the bulk of the book is four-star material. The last chapter is absolutely leadership gold? Intrigued? Pick it up and read it!

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### **Pete H says**

A cliched and trite trudge. It is somewhat shocking that this book is in its 4th edition, and is mostly composed of common sense platitudes; being required to read this for grad school is some sort of punishment, surely. To be fair, some of the author's points about the dangers of micromanagement and engaging employees on a personal level are well-founded, but perhaps not a lesson that required 350 pages to convey.

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### **Seth says**

Great ideas and insights from within the book:

Clarify values

Good exercise – write a tribute to yourself:

1. What do you stand for?
2. What do you believe in?
3. What are you discontent about?
4. What brings you suffering?
5. What makes you weep and wail?
6. What makes you jump for joy?
7. What are you passionate about?
8. What keeps you awake at night?
9. What's grabbed hold and won't let go?
10. What do you want for your life?
11. What is it you really care about?

Write your credo. "This I believe."

Share the above among those on the team.

Daily show someone you care. Make a call. Send a note. Show interest.

Ask purposeful questions. Example: What should you be asking if integrity is your focus? Trust? Quality? Innovation? Growth? Personal responsibility?

Critical incidents – best opportunities for teachable moments.

Excellent behavior – reward it if you want it repeated.

Do personal audits

- Your daily routines
- Your calendar
- Agendas at meetings
- How you deal with critical incidents
- Make the results public

Start each meeting with a story about something someone did to demonstrate a cherished value.

Ask people what they are proud of, what brings them to work every day. Recognize that those answers define a vision for the team to grow.

Promote trust. Do the following:

- Disclose information about who you are and what you believe.
- Admit mistakes.
- Acknowledge need for personal improvement.
- Ask for feedback.
- Listen attentively.
- Invite interested parties to important meetings.
- Share information that is useful to others.
- Openly acknowledge contributions of others.
- Show you are willing to change your mind.
- Avoid negative talk about others.
- Say "we can trust them" and mean it.

Host monthly meetings – coaching conversations occur there:

Six key questions (you tell me what you see/I tell you what I see):

- Where are we going?
- Where are you going?
- What are you doing well?
- What suggestions for improvement do you have for yourself?
- How can I help you?
- What suggestions do you have for me?

If strengthening credibility is your goal, then there is no better task than speaking to every person whom you oversee for five minutes each week. For me that is probably about two hours per week.

Once a month, give a team member award that is voted on in a meeting. The award winner gets a date to . . . .

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## Carol says

I had to read this for work, which must qualify as some kind of cruel and unusual punishment. Anyway:

The Leadership Challenge – A review in clichés and idioms.

The Leadership Challenge describes itself as an evidence-based primer on the near-universal qualities of excellent leaders. Its authors state that they have conducted years of research on leadership, and have distilled the data into what they have identified as the five practices of successful leaders.

Each of the five practices is then separated into its own section, in which the authors completely fail to clearly define it. Sleeping on this book and attempting to absorb it by osmosis might be a more effective way of digesting its contents.

The following is my interpretation of what the five practices of successful leaders are.

1. Model the behavior that you would like to elicit from your team. Clearly explaining what your values are is important, but talk is cheap. Walk the walk. Actions speak louder than words. Effective leaders expect more out of themselves than they do out of anyone else. Duh.

The authors suggest that the method by which you model the behavior that you would like to see is to first clarify internally what your own strongly held values and principles are, then to figure out how to express those values and principles in your own words, and then to identify and affirm the values you share across the organization. Finally, an aspiring leader must commit to executing on those values personally, in order to model the way for the team. Your time and attention should be spent on the things that you expect your team to find important.

2. Inspire a shared vision in your team with enthusiastic commitment to accomplishing goals. This category is pretty fuzzy, but it seems to suggest that an effective leader first sincerely believes in the pursuit of team goals and achievements, and second, utilizes his or her own enthusiasm to recruit team members into sharing that commitment. This category also involves ensuring that your team understands where you're going and how you're going to get there. "Vision" in this sense can be equated with "purpose."

3. "Challenge the Process." Again, this is a very fuzzy concept. I interpret it as saying that effective leaders ignore, cut through, and/or find some way to bypass red tape in order to achieve shared goals. As an umbrella concept, this includes fearlessly utilizing new processes, systems, or products, not being hidebound, and thinking outside of the box. Build a better mousetrap, light a candle rather than curse the darkness, etc.

4. Enable others to act. Effective leaders make sure that their team is able to perform to the best of their abilities, and delegate authority and discretion along with tasks. Effective leaders think of themselves as part of their team, rather than the commander of their team, and solicit team opinions and input. This includes giving serious consideration to team opinions and input, not just soliciting input for the sake of saying that you did it.

5. Encourage and appreciate team contributions and efforts. Please and thank you aren't just for charm school. Who knew.

In addition to looking at the five practices of successful leaders, the authors also examine what "constituents" look for, expect from, and admire in their leaders. Personally, a snappy uniform always does it for me. But for others, in order to inspire people to willingly follow them, a leader must be (in order of importance): (1) honest, (2) forward-looking, (3) inspiring, and (4) competent. According to the book, these qualities can be further defined by one core concept, which is credibility.

1. In all of the research done by the authors, they have consistently found that "honesty" is the most important category. The reason for this is that the category of "honesty" has so many corollary qualities, such as ethics, trustworthiness, and integrity. The honesty of a leader also weighs heavily on a team's view of its members. That is, following a leader perceived to be dishonest or untrustworthy tends to make a team lose respect not only for its leader but for the team members. Following a leader who is perceived to be trustworthy and honest makes the team feel better about themselves and about their job.
2. The "forward-looking" category mostly relates to a leader's "sense of direction and concern for the future of the organization." My sense of this category is that the more that a team feels as though their leader is actually part of the active guiding force in the organization, the better they feel about following that leader's directions.
3. The "inspiring" category is related to a team's sense of their leader's commitment to and enthusiasm for team activities and goals. Teams are more likely to want to follow a leader who is sincerely enthusiastic about the work at hand, and who can positively convey a sense of the meaning and importance of that work to their team.
4. "Competence" is pretty self-explanatory, but generally, it's difficult for a team to commit to following a leader who isn't perceived to have the knowledge, experience or skills necessary to set and achieve team goals.

Honestly, I'm pretty sure that the entire book can be distilled down to two concepts. The first is that if you're in a leadership position, your own behavior has to be exemplary. Your team will only work as hard as they see you working. The second is that you have to know what your team is doing, and you have to support them in doing it. No one wants to work for a leader who they feel is working against them or who simply doesn't care about what they're doing. I don't know why anyone needs a \$25.00 book to explain this stuff. Being a human person who recognizes that others are also human persons should be sufficient.

Finally, the book addresses the question of whether any of this really matters. Unsurprisingly, the answer is yes. In terms of employee engagement, productivity, efficiency, and retention of top talent, excellent leadership makes an enormous impact. So, get on it folks.

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**Randolph Breschini says**

A great, great book...very practical advice...I thoroughly enjoyed it...Dr. Pozner was one of my professors at SCU Graduate Business School...I advise this book for all my colleagues, especially my friends in Sri Lanka...read it...noodle on what is revealed...look around...look inside...you will know in your hearts who are the leaders! Enjoy!

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### **Daniel Zaltsman says**

The book is great in that it covers a lot of real-life examples of leadership exhibited in organizations of all sizes and industries all around the world. The principles in it are also key to success. I probably could have skimmed the whole book and gotten a similar level of output. Glad I learned that for future similar texts.

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