

THE BIG IDEAS



The Five Practices
Of Exemplary Leadership

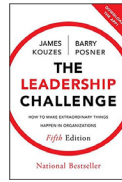
Foundation of Leadership?
Credibility.

DWYSYWD
Law #2.

Hopes + Dreams + Visions
Yours?

Challenges
= Calls to greatness.

Love
The best-kept secret of leadership.



The Leadership Challenge

How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations

BY JAMES M. KOUZES & BARRY Z. POSNER · JOSSEY-BASS © 2012 · 416 PAGES

“Leaders get people moving. They energize and mobilize. They take people and organizations to places they have never been before. Leadership is not a fad, and the leadership challenge never goes away.

In uncertain and turbulent times, accepting that challenge is the only antidote to chaos, stagnation, and disintegration. Times change, problems change, technologies change, and people change. Leadership endures. Teams, organizations, and communities need people to step up and take charge. That is why we wrote *The Leadership Challenge*, and why we found it imperative to write this fifth edition.

Change is the province of leaders. It is the work of leaders to inspire people to do things differently, to struggle against uncertain odds, and to persevere toward a misty image of a better future. Without leadership there would not be the extraordinary efforts to solve existing problems and realize unimagined opportunities. We have today, at best, only faint clues of what the future may hold, but we are confident that without leadership the possibilities will neither be envisioned nor attained.”

~ James M. Kouzes & Barry Z. Posner from *The Leadership Challenge*

[James Kouzes](#) and [Barry Posner](#) are professors at Santa Clara University's business school and two of the world's preeminent researchers on leadership.

This is the 25th anniversary, fifth edition version of their best-selling classic that has sold over 2 million copies.

[John Maxwell](#), another leadership guru and author of [The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership](#) (see Notes), calls this book one of the five best books he's *ever* read.

One of the things I most like about this book is the fact that it covers the SCIENCE of leadership. Kouzes and Posner have been conducting empirical research for over three decades. Although it's always fun to tap into various perspectives, I love data-driven wisdom.

(Another example of data-driven wisdom: [The 7 Principles of Making Marriage Work](#). [John Gottman](#) has been studying relationships for decades and he likes to make the point that a lot of therapists/authors have *opinions* about what makes a marriage work; he focuses on what the data has proven works. I like that.)

If you had to only read one book on leadership, I'd suggest this one. (Get a copy [here](#).)

The book is packed (!) with Big Ideas. I'm excited to share a few of my favorites so let's jump straight in!

“In the end, we realize that leadership development is self-development. Meeting the leadership challenge is a personal-and daily-challenge for everyone. We know that if you have the will and the way to lead, you can. You have to supply the will. We'll do our best to keep supplying the way.”

~ James M. Kouzes & Barry Z. Posner

THE FIVE PRACTICES OF EXEMPLARY LEADERSHIP

"We've also found that in the best organizations, everyone, regardless of title or position, is encouraged to act like a leader."

~ James M. Kouzes & Barry Z. Posner

"We first asked people in the early 1980s to tell us what they did when they were at their 'personal best' in leading others, and we continue to ask this question of people around the world. After analyzing thousands of these leadership experiences, we discovered, and continue to find, that regardless of the times or setting, people who guide others along pioneering journeys follow surprisingly similar paths. Although each experience is unique in its individual expression, there were clearly identifiable behaviors and actions that made a difference. When making extraordinary things happen in organizations, leaders engage in what we call The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership. They

- Model the Way
- Inspire a Shared Vision
- Challenge the Process
- Enable Others to Act
- Encourage the Heart

These leadership practices are not the private property of the people we studied. Nor do they belong to a few select shining stars. Leadership is not about who you are; it's about what you do."

After studying thousands of individuals describing their "personal-best leadership experiences," Kouzes and Posner distilled the essence of leadership down to The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership.

Let's take a quick look at each:

- 1. Practice #1: Model the Way.** The first step of exemplary leadership is inward. We need to know who we are, what we're here to do and why we're doing it. We need a clear sense of our values. Then, we need to practice what we preach, remembering that what we DO speaks so loudly that people can't hear what we say. We need to model the way.
- 2. Practice #2: Inspire a Shared Vision.** Exemplary leaders look forward and create a vision of a better possible future. And, of course, they must share that vision with others. Did you know the word *inspire* literally means "to breathe life into"? Yep. An exemplary leader BREATHES LIFE INTO a vision that fires other people up—helping them connect *their* values to a shared goal.
- 3. Practice #3: Challenge the Process.** Doing something that's never been done before is, by definition, hard. (If it was easy, it would already be done, eh?) Exemplary leaders embrace the challenges inherent to bringing their vision to life. They break the big dream down into doable baby steps and celebrate small wins. They're resilient/hardy/gritty—eating stress like energy bars as they keep everyone energized for the long haul.
- 4. Practice #4: Enable Others to Act.** Leadership, by definition, isn't about trying to do something great as a Lone Ranger. It's about inspiring others to share the dream and then creating the circumstances so they can do their absolute best work. Exemplary leaders believe in the potential of people on their team, they trust them to do great work and give them the autonomy to go out and crush it. (People like that. A lot.)
- 5. Practice #5: Encourage the Heart.** The secret weapon of the exemplary leader? LOVE. We need to love what we do, the people with whom we do it and the people we're blessed to serve. It takes courage to do extraordinary work. Remember that the word *courage* literally means "heart" in Latin. It's the virtue that vitalizes all the other virtues the same way the heart vitalizes our arms and legs and organs. To *encourage* is to build up courage in others. That takes a lot a love.

"People commit to causes not to plans."

~ James M. Kouzes & Barry Z. Posner

Quick inventory: When you take a look at those five practices, where are you strong? What can you use some work? Tiny things you can do to +1% incrementally optimize today?

Remember: Leadership is a learnable skill.

It's "not about who you are; it's about what you do."

"The Kouzes-Posner First Law of Leadership: If you don't believe the messenger, you won't believe the message."

~ James M. Kouzes & Barry Z. Posner

THE FOUNDATION OF LEADERSHIP? CREDIBILITY.

"Credibility is the foundation of leadership. Constituents must be able, above all else, to believe in their leaders. For them to willingly follow someone else, they must believe that the leader's word can be trusted, that she is personally passionate and enthusiastic about the work, and that she has the knowledge and skill to lead."

The foundation of leadership? Credibility.

The essence of credibility? Four characteristics. We'll share those in a moment.

For now, out of the 20 characteristics below, which 7 do you most look for in a leader you'd willingly follow?

Ambitious	Courageous	Honest	Loyal
Broad-minded	Dependable	Imaginative	Mature
Caring	Determined	Independent	Self-Controlled
Competent	Fair-minded	Inspiring	Straightforward
Cooperative	Forward-looking	Intelligent	Supportive

What're the *Top 7* characteristics you look for in a leader worth following?

Take a moment to reflect on that before continuing...

If you're like the 100,000+ people to whom Kouzes and Posner have posed that question, you probably included these four qualities in your list (apparently these always receive more than 60% of the votes):

- **Honest**
- **Forward-looking**
- **Competent**
- **Inspiring**

Those four characteristics provide stability to the foundation of leadership: credibility.

An exemplary leader is *Honest*. We can trust them.

An exemplary leader is *Forward-looking*. They have a vision of the future that inspires us.

An exemplary leader is *Competent*. They know what they're doing and get results.

An exemplary leader is *Inspiring*. They breathe life into us—believing in and showing us how to reach our potential.

How about YOU?

Are you honest? Forward-looking? Competent? Inspiring?

How can you +1% each of those a little more today?

P.S. John Maxwell echoes this wisdom in *21 Laws*: "Most high achievers spend time developing their professional skills. They seek to be highly competent. Fewer focus on their character. What are you currently doing to develop your character?"

I recommend that you focus on three main areas: integrity, authenticity, and discipline. To develop your integrity, make a commitment to yourself to be scrupulously honest. Don't shave the truth, don't tell white lies, and don't fudge numbers. Be truthful even when it hurts. To develop authenticity, be yourself with everyone. Don't play politics, role play, or pretend to be anything you're not. To strengthen your discipline, do the right things every day regardless of how you feel."

Remember: Honest + Forward-looking + Competent + Inspiring. <-- The essence of credibility which is the foundation of leadership.

"Even though leaders have grand visions about the future, they get there one step at a time, building momentum as well as the strength and resolve to continue forward along the journey."

~ James M. Kouzes & Barry Z. Posner

DWYSYWD ← TOP LEADERSHIP TIP

"We refer to it as **The Kouzes-Posner Second Law of Leadership:**

You build a credible foundation of leadership when you DWYSYWD—Do What You Say You Will Do.

DWYSYWD has two essential parts: say and do. The practice of Model the Way links directly to these two dimensions of the behavioral definition of credibility. Modeling is about clarifying values and setting an example for others based on those values. The consistent living out of values is the way leaders demonstrate their honesty and trustworthiness. It's what gives them the moral authority to lead. And that's where we begin our discussion of The Five Practices."

The Kouzes-Posner Second Law of Leadership:

DWYSYWD

I love it. :)

—> DO WHAT YOU SAY YOU WILL DO.

Period.

Reminds of [Stephen Covey](#). In [Primary Greatness](#) he tells us "A life of total integrity is the only one worth striving for." (While he reminds us that there are no perfect human beings and that, although we'll never actually *hit* the target of total integrity, it's the only one worthy of our aim.)

So... The most direct route to total integrity?

DWYSYWD.

How're *you* doing with that?

P.S. Wondering what the first law is? Here you go: "**The Kouzes-Posner First Law of Leadership: If you don't believe the messenger, you won't believe the message.**" :)

P.P.S. Best way to rock Law #1 and get people to believe you? Follow Law #2: DWYSYWD.

HOPES, DREAMS, ASPIRATIONS

"In every personal best-case, leaders talked about ideals. They expressed a desire to make dramatic changes in the business-as-usual environment. They reached for something grand, something magnificent, something that had never been done before.

Visions are about ideals. They're about hopes, dreams, and aspirations. They're about the strong desire to achieve something great. They're ambitious. They're expressions of optimism. Can you imagine a leader enlisting others in a cause by saying, 'I'd like you to join me in doing the ordinary'? Not likely. Visions stretch people to imagine exciting possibilities, breakthrough technologies, and revolutionary social change."

"Hey! I have this mediocre idea to keep on doing the same old thing but in a particularly boring manner. Wanna join me?!" (Hah. Right.)

"You have to spend more of today thinking more about tomorrow if your future is going to be an improvement over the present."

~ James M. Kouzes & Barry Z. Posner

Leaders are pioneers—willing to explore the unknown. Leaders dream—big, inspiring, audacious, never-been-done-before, make-the-world-a-better-place kinda dreams.

What are YOUR dreams?

For your family? _____

Your work? _____

Your life? _____

*"Challenge is the opportunity
for greatness."*

~ James M. Kouzes & Barry Z. Posner

Breathe life into those visions. Lead!!

CHALLENGES = CALLS TO GREATNESS

"When people recall their personal-best leadership experiences, they always think about some kind of challenge. Why? Because personal and business hardships have a way of making people come face-to-face with who they really are and what they're capable of becoming. They test people, and they require inventive ways of dealing with new situations. They tend to bring out the best in people. When times are stable and secure, however, people are not severely tested. They may perform well, get promoted, and even achieve fame and fortune. But certainty and routine breed complacency."

That's from Practice #3: Challenge the Process.

Recall that part of Kouzes + Posners' research methodology is to interview people regarding their "personal-best leadership experiences"—those times when they really showed up as their best-selves and crushed it.

Note: When they describe themselves at their best, ALL OF THEM TALK ABOUT THEIR CHALLENGING TIMES.

(Note: None of them talk about the times they were just coasting along.)

As we've discussed countless times, if we want to perform at our best, we need to turn up the heat and hit our activation point. 210 degrees = not a lot going on. 212 degrees = boiling water. 449 degrees? Whatever. 451 degrees = fire.

"Good coaches also ask good questions. ... her personal motto is 'Ask, don't tell.' She learned it from Peter Drucker, who said, 'The leader of the future asks; the leader of the past tells.'"

~ James M. Kouzes & Barry Z. Posner

Reflect on YOUR personal-best leadership experience.

What was going on? How did you respond? Think about that for a moment.

....

My strong hunch is you were CHALLENGED!!

Know this: "Challenge is the opportunity for greatness."

P.S. Pro tips from this section?

As touched on above, break your big goals into smaller chunks and MAKE PROGRESS while celebrating small wins. <— Key to sustaining high energy during challenging times.

And, of course, we've gotta have a growth mindset (Kouzes and Posner reference [Carol Dweck](#)'s research)—where we KNOW that we can get better if we put in the effort, rubbing our hands together at the sight of challenges knowing that's how we get in *Flow* (they also talk about Csikszentmihalyi) and do our best. And, we've gotta be gritty. They chat about [Angela Duckworth](#) and [Martin Seligman](#)'s research here as well. (Check out all those Notes for more.)

“Progress is not made in giant leaps; it’s made incrementally. Exemplary leaders move forward in small steps with little victories. They turn adversity into advantage, setbacks into successes. They persevere with grit and determination.”

THE BEST KEPT SECRET OF LEADERSHIP

“Leadership is everyone’s business.”

~ James M. Kouzes & Barry Z. Posner

“Of all the things that sustain a leader over time, love is the most lasting. It’s hard to imagine leaders getting up day after day, putting in the long hours and hard work it takes to get extraordinary things done, without having their hearts in it. 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.”

Leadership is not an affair of the head. Leadership is an affair of the heart.”

Those are the final words of the book.

Love. It’s the best-kept secret of leadership.

May we fall deeply in love with our lives, the people with whom we create, the people we are blessed to serve and with every step of this journey as we optimize, actualize, and LEAD.

I couldn’t do what I do without you and your support. I reflect on this daily. Thank you.

With deep love to you and your family,

B

Brian Johnson,
Chief Philosopher

If you liked this Note,
you’ll probably like...

[The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership](#)

[On Becoming a Leader](#)

[The Power of Ideals](#)

[Peak](#)

[Flow](#)

[Why We Do What We Do](#)

[Louder Than Words](#)

[Broadcasting Happiness](#)

[The Road to Character](#)

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About the Author of “The Leadership Challenge”

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James Kouzes is the Dean’s Executive Fellow of Leadership, Leavey School of Business at Santa Clara University, and lectures on leadership around the world to corporations, governments, and nonprofits. Kouzes and Posner are the authors of *Credibility*, *The Truth About Leadership*, *A Leader’s Legacy*, *Encouraging the Heart*, and *The Student Leadership Challenge*, among many other works. Connect: leadershipchallenge.com.



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Brian Johnson loves helping people optimize their lives as he studies, embodies and teaches the fundamentals of optimal living—integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + common sense + virtue + mastery + fun. Learn more and optimize your life at brianjohnson.me.