

Mastering Self-Leadership

EMPOWERING YOURSELF FOR PERSONAL EXCELLENCE

Second Edition



Charles C. Manz • Christopher P. Neck

SECOND EDITION

Mastering Self-Leadership

Empowering Yourself for
Personal Excellence

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To Karen, Mom, and Dad
the three people who contributed the most
to my acquisition of self-leadership
sufficient to write this book.

CM

To Jumper and Dr. Patin
who showed me that
my only limitations
are those that I place
on myself.

CN

Preface

“Argue for your limitations and sure enough, they’re yours.”

—Richard Bach

History provides numerous examples of successful people who were confronted with many “can’ts” in terms of making their dreams come true.

- **Sandra Day O’Conner**, the first woman on the United States Supreme Court, could not get a job as a lawyer on graduating from law school. The only job offered to her was that of a legal secretary.
- **Michael Jordan**, arguably the best basketball player of all time, was cut from his high school basketball team.
- **Ludwig van Beethoven**, one of the world’s major composers, was told by a music teacher that he had no talent for music. In fact this teacher once remarked about Beethoven, “As a composer he is hopeless.”
- As a young man, **Walt Disney**, the great cartoonist and movie producer, was advised to pursue another line of work by a newspaper editor in Kansas City, “You don’t have any creative, original ideas.”
- A Munich schoolmaster told 10-year-old **Albert Einstein**, who later became a brilliant scientist, “You will never amount to much.”
- In 1962, Decca Recording Company turned down the opportunity to work with an unknown music group called **The Beatles**. Their rationale was “We don’t like their sound and guitar music is on the way out.” Of course, this “unknown” singing group subsequently became a legendary group of musicians.
- **Dr. Seuss’s** first children’s book, *And To Think That I Saw It On Mulberry Street*, was rejected by 27 publishers. The twenty-eighth publisher, Vanguard Press, sold 6 million copies of the book.
- The book *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, written by **Jack Canfield** and **Mark Hansen**, was turned down by 33 publishers before Health Communications agreed to publish it. All the major New York publishers said, “It is too nicey nice” and “Nobody wants to read a book of short little stories.” Since that time, more than 10 million copies of the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series have been sold worldwide, with translations in 20 languages.
- In 1935, the *New York Herald Tribune’s* review of **George Gershwin’s** classic *Porgy and Bess* stated that it was “surefire rubbish.”
- **Thomas Edison**, the inventor of the electric light, the phonograph, and more than a hundred other useful items, was told by a teacher that he was too stupid to learn anything.

- During their first year in business, the **Coca-Cola Company** sold only 400 bottles of Coke.
- In response to **Fred Smith's** term paper proposing reliable overnight delivery service, a Yale University management professor wrote, "The concept is interesting and well formed, but in order to earn better than a C, the idea must be feasible." Of course, Smith went on to establish Federal Express Corporation, based on the ideas in this "average" paper.
- Inventor **Chester Carlson** pounded the streets for years before he found backers for his Xerox photocopying process.
- Before he founded Apple Computer Inc., **Steve Jobs** was rejected by Atari and Hewlett-Packard during his attempt to get interest in his personal computer idea. Hewlett-Packard personnel remarked, "Hey, we don't need you. You haven't gotten through college yet." Jobs thus pursued the idea himself, and Apple's first year's sales exceeded \$2.5 million.
- In December 1977, with only \$20,000 to his name, **Michael Burton** was laughed at by colleagues and bankers when he quit his lucrative small business consulting job and vowed to turn his snowsurfing concept into a popular sport. By 1998, however, Burton was owner of Burton Snowboards, the largest pure snowboarding company in the world, with annual sales of over \$150 million. Due to Burton's promotional efforts, snowboarding is enjoyed by 8 million people worldwide, and it officially became a medal sport in the 1998 Winter Olympics. Who's laughing now?

These are just a few illustrations of people who persevered—who led themselves by using their strengths, skills, and determination to overcome the "can'ts" in their lives—who in their mind knew they could do it. They did not let initial failures rob them of their dreams. They followed their inner voices and kept forging ahead until their fantasies became realities.

What is your dream? Is it perhaps to become a doctor? A lawyer? A supermodel? A CEO? Is it to start your own business? To raise a healthy and happy family? To become a teacher? A rock star? A television news anchor? Maybe you want to win an Academy Award? Possibly even become president of the USA? Despite what some may try to tell you, whatever you want to become, you *can*! As William A. Ward once wrote,

If you can believe it, you can achieve it;
If you can dream it, you can become it.

Do you believe in yourself and your ability to make your dreams come true? We hope this book provides you with the skills to lead yourself toward living your goals and dreams. We hope our words solidify your belief in your potential and abilities, so that you can achieve and become whatever you desire. Most of all, we hope the knowledge within the following pages will help you to travel the paths of Michael Jordan, Walt Disney, Dr. Suess, Albert Einstein, and others. These individuals believed that the impossible was possible; that the unthinkable was thinkable; that the undoable was doable. These remarkable individuals *thought* they could; these go-getters *knew* they could! Hopefully, this book will help *you* to also lead yourself to personal excellence!

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Dr. Manz has published numerous articles and presented many papers at professional meetings on topics such as leadership, self-managed work teams, vicarious learning, and power and control. His work has especially focused on the topic of self-leadership and has been featured on television and radio and in national publications including *The Wall Street Journal*, *Fortune*, and *Success*. He is the author of *The Leadership Wisdom of Jesus: Practical Lessons for Today*, Berrett Koehler, 1998; and *Mastering Self-Leadership: Empowering Yourself for Personal Excellence*, Prentice-Hall, 1992. He is co-author of *SuperLeadership: Leading Others to Lead Themselves*, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1989, Berkley, 1990; *Business Without Bosses: How Self-Managing Teams are Creating High-Performing Companies*, Wiley, 1993, 1995; and *Company of Heroes: Unleashing the Power of Self-Leadership*, Wiley, 1996, which have been translated into several foreign languages. He is also co-author of the book *For Team Members Only: Making Your Workplace Team Productive and Hassle-Free*, Amacom, 1997.

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CHAPTER I

The Journey

It is not easy to find happiness in ourselves, and it is not possible to find it elsewhere.

—Agnes Repplier

“I can do it!” he shouted at the figure across the room. “All my life you’ve been holding me back, beating me down—I’ve had it!” “Why? Why can’t you just let me be? I could really be somebody,” he continued, now in a pleading voice. For a while he was quiet except for the sound of his own deep breathing. He just stared at what he now realized was his ultimate adversary. The figure was still; it said nothing. “Oh, God,” he sighed. He shifted his gaze to the bright lights of the city below. Beginning to see the possibilities for his life, he felt a surge of excitement, of potential purpose, go through his every fiber.

He was lost somewhere in his imagination for what seemed several minutes. Suddenly reality hit him squarely and coldly again. His sense of possible escape was lost. He felt the chains weighing heavy on his soul. And he returned his gaze slowly, steadily, helplessly to the figure of his oppressor. Once more he looked squarely into the eyes of the figure in the mirror before him.

This book will encourage you to “look into the mirror.” It emphasizes that we choose what we are and what we become. It recognizes that the world does not always cooperate with our goals, but that we largely create that personal world with which we must cope. It also points out that we influence our actions in countless ways, of which we may not even be aware.

The world is experiencing a knowledge explosion. It is frightening to realize that what we learn often becomes obsolete in a short time. What doesn’t change, however, is our need to deal effectively with this complex world and to lead ourselves to fulfillment in life. If we can develop the ability to renew ourselves continually and to overcome our obstacles on our way to life’s exhilarations, we can become what we choose for ourselves.

LEADERSHIP

This book is not about leadership of others. Instead, it is about something more fundamental and more powerful—*self*-leadership. It is about the leadership that we exercise over ourselves. In fact, if we ever hope to be effective leaders of others, we need first to

2 CHAPTER 1 The Journey

be able to effectively lead ourselves. To understand better the process of self-leadership and how we can improve our capability in this area, it is useful first to explore the meaning of the term *leadership*.

There are a seemingly endless number of definitions and descriptions of leadership—largely as a result of the vast number of persons who have researched and written about the subject (and the equal vastness of their different viewpoints). One widely recognized name associated with the topic is the now deceased—Ralph M. Stogdill. Dr. Stogdill authored a handbook of leadership, published in 1974, which reviewed theory and research on the subject. Since that time this book has been revised by Bernard M. Bass, most recently in 1990.¹ The book has pointed out that leadership has been conceived of in many ways, including the art of inducing compliance, a personality concept, a form of persuasion, a set of acts or behaviors, an instrument of goal achievement, an effect of group interaction, a differentiated role, and the exercise of influence. All of these descriptions have some merit. The most useful definition of leadership—to focus on the idea of self-leadership—however, is simply “a process of influence.” This short definition is a broad and meaningful one that recognizes both the importance of human influence in determining what we are and what we do and the complexity involved (influence takes place not as an isolated event, but as a process involving many parts).

The existing literature on leadership is almost universally focused on influence exercised by one or more persons over others (in other words, influence exercised by “leaders” on others). In undertaking a journey toward achievement of an understanding and improvement of our own self-leadership, the first step involved is recognizing that leadership is not just an outward process; that is, we can and do lead ourselves.

SOURCES OF LEADERSHIP

Leadership (the process of influence) can originate from a number of sources. The most commonly recognized source of leadership, of course, involves the influence leaders exercise over their followers. This is also the most externally oriented view of leadership. It does not recognize the influence that we exercise on ourselves. An example of this external view is the giving of orders and use of other methods of influence (such as rewards and punishments) by a formal organization manager over his or her subordinates.

A pictorial representation of different sources of leadership follows (see Figure 1-1). It depicts leadership as ranging from an entirely external influence process, at one extreme, to a self-imposed process at the other. The latter focus is the primary topic of this book. In between these two extremes, leadership influence consists of different combinations of external influence and self-influence. When a goal is jointly set by a manager and a subordinate, a participative leadership process is at work.

At this point we are ready to take the next step of our journey; that is, the journey into ourselves toward the realization that we do lead ourselves.



FIGURE I-1 Sources of Leadership

WE ALL LEAD OURSELVES

Even in the most highly controlled situations, we influence our behavior in various ways. If you have a boss who gives you very detailed orders and frequently checks your progress (and probably is not too shy to let you know what you're doing wrong), you still possess a great deal of discretion. The method or order in which you complete tasks, for example, is left to you. What you think about while you work is also up to you. If you choose to set a higher or lower personal goal for yourself than what your boss expects, that too is up to you. You can feel good about your progress or be tough on yourself for even the smallest of mistakes if you choose.

The point is that you are your own leader much of the time. Even if you are faced with very influential external leaders, they are not likely to be staring over your back every minute. In their absence, who is in charge? You, of course. Even if they are present, they cannot look into your mind. In fact, we are our own ultimate leaders. We are capable of negating anything we hear externally and substituting our own internal communication. (Example: From boss: "You're loafing, and what little work you *are* doing is poor quality." To self: "Everyone around here knows I'm the best worker in our department—obviously, the boss is being an unreasonable S.O.B. today.")

Consider the following story:

On a construction site in the Southwest, when the lunch whistle sounded, all the workers would sit together to eat. Every day Joe would open his lunch pail and start to complain. "Gosh darnit," he'd cry, "Not again—a bologna sandwich and corn chips." Day after day, week after week, Joe would moan and groan and say, "Not again, a bologna sandwich and corn chips."

Weeks passed and other workers were getting tired of his complaining. Finally, one of Joe's fellow construction workers said, "C'mon Joe, what's your problem? Every day you complain about your bologna sandwich and corn chips, so, for Pete's sake, who in the heck makes your lunches?"

Joe replied, "I do."

What the story suggests is that what we do with our lives, including where we work and for whom we work, is largely left to us. In other words, we make our own lunch. If we need more training to obtain the kind of job we really want, it's up to us to lead ourselves to make the kinds of sacrifices necessary to achieve our ends. We are not trying to say that it's an easy process. In fact, to lead ourselves to do what we really want is difficult, but it can be done if we know how to go about it.

Belief in your ability to "make your own lunch"—that is, to lead yourself—can be a life or death matter. A recent study in *The Lancet*, a British medical journal, revealed that a feeling of little or no control at work explains why rank-and-file employees (civil service employees) have a greater risk of heart disease (50 percent higher) than that of top management. This book hopefully can provide you with the tools to lead yourself, to gain a feeling of more control in all aspects of your life, and thus to reduce the risk of such "helpless" feelings.²

We all lead ourselves. This is not to say that we are all effective self-leaders. On the contrary, we all have weaknesses in our own self-leadership process. In some people the

process is very dysfunctional. Many lead themselves into the wrong line of work and into the wrong job; even more lead themselves into unhappiness and discontentment with their lives. Perhaps the saddest of all are those who give up much of their own self-leadership potential to others and are led into equally negative conditions. The point is that you are your own leader, and just like any leader you can be a good one or a bad one. In the pages that follow we attempt to help you understand your own self-leadership patterns and how to improve them. The ideas you choose to adopt for yourself, however, are up to you. After all, you are your own leader.

SELF-LEADERSHIP

Building on the definition of leadership presented earlier in this chapter, self-leadership can be stated as “the process of influencing oneself.” This definition is, of course, general and does not provide the detail necessary to gain a better understanding or a more effective execution of the process. It does point out, though, the global target at which this book is focused—the process that we experience in influencing ourselves. The primary elements of this process will be presented and discussed throughout the remainder of the book. First, however, we attempt to summarize, in a general sense, the primary ingredients of self-leadership.

The concept of self-leadership is derived primarily from research and theory in two areas of psychology. The first, *social cognitive theory*,³ recognizes the adoption and change of human behavior as a complex process with many parts. It recognizes that we influence as well as are influenced by the world we live in (more on this idea in chapter 2). The theory places importance on the capacity of a person to manage or control oneself—particularly when faced with difficult yet important tasks (this viewpoint serves as the primary basis for chapter 3). Social cognitive theory also recognizes the human ability to learn and experience tasks or events through vicarious and symbolic mechanisms (which points out the importance of our ability to learn by observing others and to use our imagination). Chapter 5 will address these ideas more fully. Finally, the social cognitive theory stresses the importance of our perceptions of our own effectiveness or potential to be effective (more of this in chapter 8).

The second important area of knowledge for this book can be described as *intrinsic motivation theory* (and even more specifically as *cognitive evaluation theory*).⁴ This viewpoint emphasizes the importance of the “natural” rewards that we enjoy from doing activities or tasks that we like. The ideas included in the writings on intrinsic motivation point out the potential to harness the motivational forces available in doing things that we can really enjoy (chapter 4 will address these ideas).

The knowledge included in these two insightful areas concerning human behavior represents the major foundation for this book. Ideas will also be borrowed from other bodies of knowledge, including motivation theory and leadership theory. Overall, this book will recognize the importance of forces that we use to influence ourselves (often without being aware of them) and the potential for altering our worlds so that they are more motivating to us. At this moment, to help you visualize the concept of self-leadership and its application to your life, please ponder the following poem:

LEADING THE BAND

He was going to be the President
Of the U. S. of A.

She was going to become an actress
In a Broadway play.

As youngsters - these were their dreams;
The visions they aspired to.
They truly thought these aspirations,
Eventually, would one day come true.

But he did not become President.
The reason is the ultimate sin.
He never ran for office.
He feared he would not win.

She didn't make it to New York City.
In fact, never set a foot on the stage.
She thought she'd forget her lines.
In other words - she was afraid.

The lesson in these stories
Is that you must get up and try.
If you let your fears control you,
Your dreams will quickly die.

Because if you want to hit a home run,
You have to go up to the plate.
If you want to meet that special person,
You have to ask them for a date.

The biggest crime in life
Is to forget what you have dreamt.
It's not the act of losing
But to have never made the attempt.

So as you battle with your fears in life,
Remember this brief command:
"If you're not afraid to face the music,
You may one day lead the band."

Christopher Neck, *Medicine for the Mind: Healing Words to Help You Soar* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996).