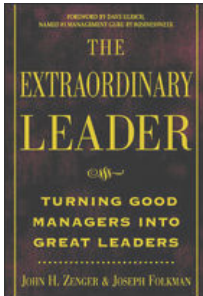


Book Reviews for Managers

The Extraordinary Leader Turning Good Managers into Great Leaders by John H. Zenger & Joseph Folkman



McGraw Hill, 2002
ISBN #0-07-138747-1

*"...leadership
development is a
strategic imperative"*

REVIEWED BY IAN COOK

"Good leaders...neither they nor their leaders appear to recognize the substantial contribution they could make by moving from being merely good to great"

This is just one of the many intriguing new perspectives this book brings to the subject of leadership. Whether you are looking to develop your own leadership capacity or that of your employees, you will find much here to provoke your thinking and guide your actions.

Of course, every author on leadership has a model. Zenger and Folkman present a clean, comprehensive one nested in a terrific metaphor: a tent.

Imagine a standard tent held up by five tent poles (or clusters of leadership competencies and behaviors). The center pole is called *Character*. It includes integrity, ethics, and humility. The four poles that support the tent sides are *Personal Capability* (technical/professional expertise and cognitive ability), *Focus on Results*, *Interpersonal Skills* (including communicating, inspiring, connecting, developing) and *Leading Organizational Change* (the highest expression of leadership, contend the authors).

These "poles" are made up of clusters of competencies—sixteen in all—that, according to the authors' research, differentiate the most effective 20% of leaders from the rest. Extending the metaphor, "leadership effectiveness" equates to the total cubic volume under the tent canvas. So, when you heighten the length of the poles—i.e. enhance competencies—overall effectiveness will increase.

The authors call a competency a "strength" when you are rated at the 90th percentile in it. In other words, when you as a leader

are deemed to be stronger in this area than 90% of comparative leaders. Furthermore, an extraordinary leader is one who is deemed to be in the top 20% of leaders (i.e. the 80th percentile)

Their research then shows how:

- Achieving "strength" in only three competencies, if spread around the five "tent pole" clusters, moves you up to 81st percentile in overall effectiveness as a leader and
- Leaders in the top 20%, vs. the middle 60%, in terms of leadership effectiveness, generate significantly greater results in measures such as net profit, customer service and employee commitment.

Zenger and Folkman make a strong case for investing in development that will shift your current managers from being good leaders to being extraordinary ones. The problem is, as the opening quote expresses, good, solid, average leaders tend to remain at their current level of effectiveness. Why? First of all, they themselves don't see the need to become better leaders. Secondly, senior management does not see the payback from the exceptional results that extraordinary leaders achieve. This reminds me of the maxim, "Good is the enemy of the best."

From the many insights they offer in the book, let me highlight just four, ones that particularly caught my eye:

- *No one pattern or configuration of competencies exists that works for all leaders or in all organizations.* There is, emphatically, no one way to lead.
- *The quality of leadership at lower levels of the organization rarely surpasses the leadership effectiveness demonstrated by the top team.* So, sadly, if the senior executives are only mediocre as lead-

“Senior leaders’ competencies establish the ceiling”



Ian Cook, trainer, consultant, keynote speaker and Principal of Fulcrum Associates Inc., helps managers and supervisors get more from their people and teams through modern leadership approaches. Contact Ian to discuss the ideas in this article or to find out about related training programs, facilitation and coaching services, and keynote presentations for your organization.

ers, extraordinary leadership will not emerge. Senior leaders’ competencies establish the ceiling. Here is a powerful reason to attend to leadership development at the very top.

- *Strong leaders aren’t just born; they can be developed.* There is a fascinating section on how the US Marine Corps turns many recruits, many who come from dysfunctional homes and a troubled youth, into effective leaders within 2-3 years.
- *Focus on strengths, not weaknesses, as you develop leaders.* This way you are building on an already solid platform. The chances of improvement are greater. Furthermore, others will be inclined to acknowledge and praise them. And they will build self-confidence as they experience success. This, of course, reinforces further growth. A virtuous circle, no less.

Despite their own and other research that suggests the wisdom of investing in building strengths rather than eliminating “weaknesses,” Zenger and Folkman assert there are *five deficiencies you simply cannot overlook*. Possessing any one of these shortcomings, makes it virtually impossible to be regarded as an effective, let alone extraordinary, leader.

These “Five Fatal Flaws” are readily visible to others, yet the individual is rarely aware that he/she has them. All five stem from deficiencies in emotional intelligence, not from cognitive or technical/professional proficiency. They are:

1. Inability to learn from one’s mistakes
2. Lack of core interpersonal skills
3. Lack of openness to new or different ideas
4. Lack of accountability (for performance)
5. Lack of initiative

The book has **advice for organizations** committed to developing their current and future leaders. Here are some points:

- Adopt one model of leadership and stick with it.
- Set very high expectations for your leaders (e.g. Achieve the 90th percentile in at least one competency from each “tent pole” cluster).
- Continue to develop your leadership

capacity at the very senior level.

- Involve executives in leadership development, especially as presenters.
- Include multiple learning vehicles such as 360° feedback, coaches/mentors and “action learning” projects and tasks.
- Focus on enhancing competencies that are already substantial.

Clearly, leadership development is a strategic imperative for your organization. It needs to be treated as such and, like other strategic priorities, it should be driven from the top team. This is, however, a longer-term strategy. It must be consistently applied over a number of years, use the same conceptual model and learning vehicles and receive unwavering high priority.

Zenger and Folkman also offer **advice for individuals** who want to move to an extraordinary level of leadership effectiveness. Here is a sampling:

- Develop and demonstrate high personal character (honoring your commitments, owning up to mistakes and infusing your style with an attitude of humility would be great places to start).
- Find and use the support of a coach or mentor.
- Identify 3-5 of your solid leadership competencies, across the five “poles,” and develop them further.
- Identify your weaker competencies and find ways to neutralize them (e.g. delegating or outsourcing related tasks, redesigning your job).
- Connect with and work with/for extraordinary leaders.
- Infuse energy and enthusiasm into all that you do...it ignites others enthusiasm.

Leadership, say the authors, affects every measurable dimension of organizational performance. And its impact is huge. If you have time for only a few books on this critical topic, do make *The Extraordinary Leader* one of them.

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