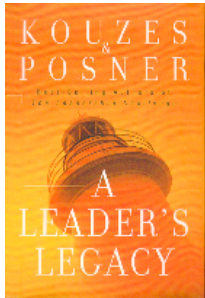


Book Reviews for Managers

A Leader's Legacy

by James M. Kouzes & Barry Z. Posner



Jossey-Bass, 2006
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"You can leave a lot of little legacies at each stop along your career journey"

REVIEWED BY IAN COOK

As a leader, would you say one of your goals is to leave a legacy? Based on their observations of leaders over the last twenty years, Kouzes and Posner expect your answer is probably "yes."

By "legacy," we don't mean just the big footprint that a retiring CEO leaves in society, technology or the marketplace. You can leave a lot of little legacies at each stop along your career journey. This is true whether you are a supervisor, manager, project leader or influential individual contributor.

These two acknowledged experts on leadership have put together their own legacy, a book that captures the essence of what it means to be a leader, based on their research, consulting and writing on the subject over several decades. This easy-to-read book has twenty-one short chapters, assembled under four areas: *Significance, Relationships, Aspirations and Courage*.

Scattered throughout the book are valuable insights too numerous to summarize. So, instead, I will draw out and comment on just a few of their points (in italics) that particularly resonated with me, from my own experience working with leaders at all levels.

Significance:

- They ask, "Are you here to do something or just for something to do?" *The most lasting legacies come from leading in a spirit of serving others.*
- This dovetails nicely with the fact that, down deep inside, your followers (staff) carry that human desire to make a difference. Most people, on their own, tend not to find deep

enough meaning in their work. So, *they look to their leaders to articulate a purpose and mobilize them toward its achievement.*

Relationships:

Leadership is personal! Your people want to know about you as a person. They need to see your humanness, including the side of you that screws up and that doesn't have the answers. Only then will they truly trust you. Earning your employees' respect is an important step but it is not enough if you want to draw their maximum contribution. As the authors so cleverly put it, you need to be more than just a "brain on legs" in the eyes of your people.

Where at all possible, *give your people the freedom to do the work their way.* In all organizations there exists a natural tension between the employer's need to control its employees and the latter's fundamental wish to be free in how they work and what they do. When you hand more control over to your staff, you tap into their natural drive for autonomy in life. This usually increases performance.

Aspirations:

- *People commit to causes, not to plans, and they respond positively to goals for which they can feel some passion.* This is typically triggered when a leader who knows what matters to her articulates both her vision and her commitment to accomplishing it. If I work for you and you are not excited about what we are trying to do, how do you expect me to become fully engaged in the work?

“Courage...is about choosing to face danger and risk, despite your fear.”



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.

- *Followers expect their leaders to be forward-looking, but not clairvoyant.* This addresses a common misconception in the leadership literature.

You don't need to possess some psychic connection to see future events, through extra-sensory perception or a crystal ball. But you do need to be focused on the future. This means devoting time to thinking about what events and situations today mean for tomorrow, asking others the implications of these same events, and tapping into many perspectives, including those of your employees. Hence, the idea of a *shared* vision.

Courage:

- *Leadership is hard work and often involves suffering on the part of the leader.* If you want to change anything, expect to encounter resistance. You may even have to hurt some people along the way. Of course, not everyone will agree with you or even like you because of your stands. This can be painful to you. Furthermore, many initiatives you champion won't succeed. It hurts to fail, especially when you have wrapped your name and reputation around the intended goal.

I am reminded of the defeated candidate for President of the United States who asked another second-place presidential finisher from a couple of decades earlier, “When does the pain of losing go away?” The earlier candidate thought for a moment and then replied, “I'll let you know when it happens.”

- *Courage—an act of leadership—can come from any of us.* Every leader the authors interviewed in the course of their work had a personal story to tell that involved courage. Most of these stories were about events from their lives, such as an adversity they overcame or a stand they felt compelled to take when their core values were challenged or offended.

Rosa Parks, on a December day in 1955, refused to give up her seat to a white passenger on a Montgomery,

Alabama bus. With this single act she demonstrated the power of one ordinary person to lead through courage and leave a legacy. Kouzes and Posner talk in the book about “Rosa Parks moments” where seemingly ordinary people choose to act courageously, show leadership and leave a legacy.

Let there not be any misconception about courage. It does not mean that you don't feel fear. Rather, it is about choosing to face danger and risk, *despite* your fear.

This is a great book if you are ready to stop for a moment, reflect and take stock of your own role as a leader. CEO's, senior and mid-level managers, front line supervisors and project leaders will find a wide range of “gems” within these pages that reflect both scholarly research and timeless truths about what's involved when humans step up to lead their fellow humans.

The beauty of thinking about your legacy forces you to frame your decisions and actions beyond just yourself in order to include how you affect others, both now and in the future.

If you manage to apply some of the insights and advice from Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner, I predict that you **will** end up leaving your leadership legacy, whether you intended to or not.

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