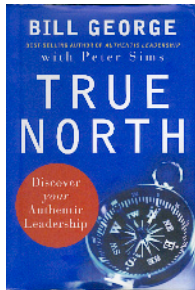


Book Reviews for Managers

True North

Discover your Authentic Leadership

by Bill George with Peter Sims



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*"This seductive idea of
being the hero can easily
engulf a leader."*

REVIEWED BY IAN COOK

How do you become and remain an authentic leader?

This was the question Bill George posed in his in-depth study of 125 leaders drawn from corporations to not-for-profits, to the arenas of politics and academia. George was CEO and then Chairman, from 1990 to 2002, of Medtronic, a world class medical technology company. In this review I want to shine a light on three elements from this book that constitute valuable perspectives for managers.

The Crucible

His research revealed an interesting common theme. Most of these successful leaders had been powerfully impacted by what he called a "crucible," a signal event or challenging situation in their lives that set them on a clear path of purpose. For example,

- **Howard Schultz**, the founder of Starbucks, saw his father lose his job as a delivery driver because he broke his ankle. Schultz strove to build a company that treated its employees well, with solid health benefits to boot.
- **Ellen Breyer**, CEO of the Hazeldon Foundation, a chemical dependency treatment organization—watched her father die from alcoholism.
- **Oprah Winfrey** had her epiphany right on her TV show. While interviewing a victim of childhood sexual abuse, Winfrey's memories of her own abuse flooded out and, for the first time, she realized that she was not to blame. She shed her heretofore deeply ingrained "pleaser" approach to life and obsession with personal success. She discovered her broader mission: to empower people—especially women—all over the world.

The Journey

Of course, after their crucible experiences, George's leaders did not suddenly turn into the effective individuals they are today. But their experiences did set them off on a journey. This voyage took them from what the author calls "I to WE." For Nelson Mandela, it was during his long incarceration on Robben Island when he realized that his leadership purpose, his "True North," was not about the "I" of getting people to follow him but rather the "WE" of reconciliation for South Africa.

This journey leaders take has three phases:

Phase I, typically up to roughly age 30, is where we experiment with our style and learn the fundamental lessons about leading—and following—upon which our later success is built. A key lesson here, says George, is that leadership is **not** about amassing a bunch of followers who will support our glorious ascension to the peaks of power. Rather it is about *empowering others on their journeys*.

In Phase II, from about 30 to 60 years of age, we deliver our best and most active leadership. We are in our prime, having prepared ourselves to step forward and do some significant leading in whatever arena we choose or find ourselves in.

Phase III has us really giving back: coaching, mentoring and encouraging other leaders, serving on boards of not-for-profit organizations, and the like.

This "I to WE" journey strikes me as the single most significant point in the book. It mirrors what most research in leadership and adult development has been discovering over the last forty years. A unit's level of performance takes a quantum leap when the leader makes this shift in purpose.

"Leaders...are the product of their respective life stories."

Isn't it ironic that the "hero's journey" that a leader takes from "I" to "WE" culminates in a higher state of development where he realizes that it's not about being a hero at all!

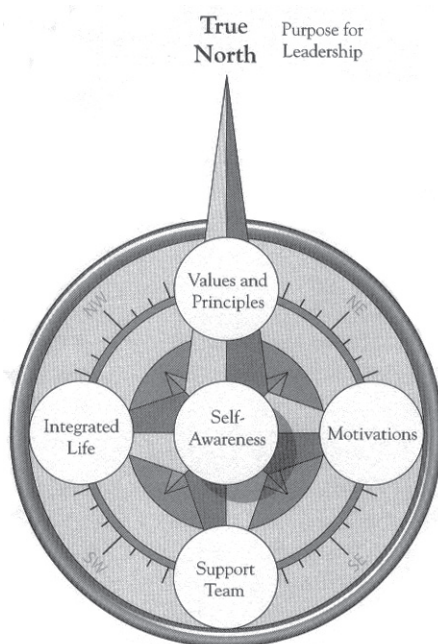
This seductive idea of being the hero can easily engulf a leader, unless she has a solid sense of her "True North," the deeper purpose—beyond her own self-interest—that she is serving. When you think about, this is true about all of life, not just leadership. The level of adult development of a leader, however, has a much greater impact—positive or negative—than that of most individual contributors.

The Internal Compass

Since Bill George uses the metaphor of compass direction, it comes as no surprise that he provides a compass to keep us focused on our own True North.



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.



From among the comments he makes about each of his five compass points, the following seem particularly worth emphasizing:

Self-Awareness. This is the foundation element in Daniel Goleman's model of Emotional Intelligence. One doesn't typically become self-aware, if ever, until middle age. But, without knowing yourself, it is difficult to know to what extent you are motivated by external symbols of success vs. deeper accomplishments beyond your own benefit.

Values & Principles. We don't know our true values for certain until we are tested under pressure in life and are faced with making trade-offs between conflicting values. Until then, our espoused values are just words and honorable intentions.

Integrated Life. Become too focused on work, without regular exposure to family, friends, community, and so forth, and you risk losing touch with your deeper humanity and taking your leader self way too seriously. It's not about absolute, equal, work-life balance. There are times when you have to shift into excessive work mode. Just make sure that, over the course of your career, you are experiencing and engaging fully in the personal side of your life.

Support Team. Helps keep you grounded. It can include family, friends, work colleagues, mentors, etc.

Motivations. The key, says George, is not to reject extrinsic motivators, such as money or fame or influence, but rather to balance these with deeper, internal goals.

So, why this book and what does it bring to managers at all levels?

The leaders whom Bill George interviewed and who have achieved leadership success all have some degree of journey behind them. They all are the product of their respective life stories.

Whether you are a supervisor, manager or even an informal leader, you too have lived and continue to live your own story. What events or situations have occurred in your life that shape your values and might help you identify a purpose as a leader? Or, at this stage in your career, do you in fact have a purpose bigger than what you will get if you hit your performance targets? Is managing people just a "job" to you? Or, is it more?

If you see yourself as a "leader" and want to develop into an even better one with a "True North" to guide you, these questions are worth posing periodically.

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