



Drucker on Leadership

New Lessons from the Father of Modern Management

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Although Peter Drucker, “The Father of Modern Management,” died in 2005, his timeless teachings are studied and practiced by forward-thinking managers worldwide. His lessons and wisdom on the topic of leadership — the central element of management — are in constant demand, yet he wrote little under that actual subject heading.

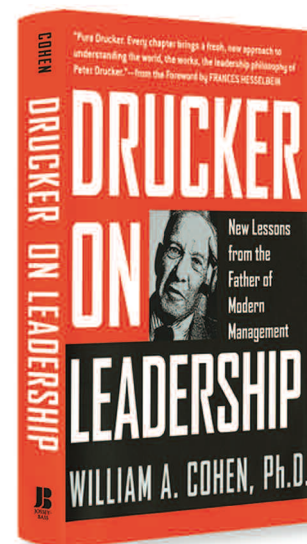
In *Drucker on Leadership*, management expert and author William A. Cohen, Ph.D., explores Drucker’s lost leadership lessons — what they are, why they are important and how to apply them.

While Drucker struggled with the concept of leadership, he was well aware that it had a critical impact on the accomplishment of all projects and human endeavors. There is no book from Drucker specifically dedicated to leadership, but a wealth of information about leadership can be found scattered throughout his 40 books and hundreds of articles.

Many of the leadership concepts revealed in *Drucker on Leadership* will surprise, and perhaps shock, Drucker’s followers. Written for anyone who values the insights of the man whose name is synonymous with excellence in management, this summary offers a deeper understanding of what makes an extraordinary leader.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- Why Drucker believed that the best book on leadership was written almost two and a half millennia ago.
- How to predict your organization’s future by creating it.
- Why leaders must determine what business they are in and who their customers are.
- How Drucker’s teachings about leadership can save many corporations from failure and help guide others to outstanding success.



by William A. Cohen, Ph.D.

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: DRUCKER ON LEADERSHIP

by William A. Cohen, Ph.D.

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Introduction: Peter Drucker and Leadership

There is little doubt that Peter Drucker, the “Father of Modern Management,” considered leadership the essential management skill. As early as 1947, he declared, “Management is leadership.” Seven years later he wrote: “Leadership is of utmost importance. Indeed there is no substitute for it.” However, despite these clear early statements, Drucker did, at times, seem to equivocate about leadership. Only a few short sentences after the statement about the importance of leadership, for example, he added, “Leadership cannot be taught or learned.”

Clearly, Drucker was ambivalent about leadership — or at least the idea that it could be taught — and he remained so for much of his career. In 1973, he reiterated, “There is no substitute for leadership. But management cannot create leaders.”

Drucker's Evolving Attitudes Toward Leadership

By 1996, Drucker had reversed himself completely. In his foreword to *The Leader of the Future*, he wrote, “Leadership must be learned and can be learned.”

Toward the end of his career, Drucker concluded not only that leadership could be learned, but also that it *should be presented* as a topic separate and distinct from management.

While Drucker did not leave us with a unified model of his concepts about effective leadership, *Drucker on Leadership* presents a distillation of his published work to provide readers with a clear and cohesive presentation of Drucker's views on leadership that, until now, have been widely scattered.

Drucker's Model for Effective Leadership

Drucker believed effective leadership rested on five basic components:

- **Strategic planning by the leader as a foundation.** The leader has to make decisions *now* to create a desired future.
- **Business ethics and personal integrity as necessary conditions.** If strategic planning was the foundation of leadership, ethics and personal integrity were necessary conditions for leadership effectiveness.
- **Leadership as taught in the military as a baseline model.** Drucker wrote, “The Army trains and develops more leaders than do all other institutions together — and with a lower casualty rate.”
- **Correct perception and application of the psychological principles of motivation.** The best way to motivate employees is to treat regular, paid, full-time staff as if they were volunteers.
- **The marketing model as an effective general approach.** By describing leadership as a marketing job, Drucker meant that leaders must know and understand those they wished to lead, and lead in a way followers could relate to. ●

Part One: The Leader's Role in Shaping the Organization's Future

In Drucker's view, a leader's primary responsibility was to think through the organization's mission clearly and then promote it throughout the organization, setting goals, priorities and standards to measure progress along the way.



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Drucker taught that determining what business you are in is essential to creating an organization's future and, therefore, is any leader's primary responsibility.

Leaders must make choices and concentrate their always limited resources where they will do the most good.

Today, we call this definition a "mission statement." Drucker's favorite mission statement, though not recent or short, came from a very old business, Sears Roebuck. Simply stated, it was to be the informed and responsible retailer, initially for the American farmer and, later, for the American family. It changed Sears from a struggling mail order house, which was sometimes close to bankruptcy, to the world's leading retailer, all within 10 years.

Of course, there is only one leader, and ultimately this leader is responsible for the final mission statement and the business.

The Process: Creating a Strategic Plan

Drucker's definition of strategic planning was "the continuous process of making present entrepreneurial (*risk-taking*) decisions systematically and with the greatest knowledge of their futurity; organizing systematically the efforts needed to carry out these decisions through *organized systematic feedback*." Implicit in this definition is that the leader is responsible for everything that happens or fails to happen in the organization.

Drucker stressed that the leader's view of the future must represent what he called "the entrepreneurial view"; that is, a willingness to think in terms of contribution, customer satisfaction and benefit to the market and the economy.

He believed that leaders must have the courage to make the future happen and that this courage must not be wasted. The decisions taken must meet the test of practicality and operational and economic validity; that is, these decisions *must be actionable* and be *able to produce* real economic results. Finally, Drucker stated that leaders must be personally committed to what they envisioned. In addition, he believed that whatever reaching the future entailed, it must be risky because the one idea about the future that was certain to fail was the riskless idea.

Look, Listen and Analyze: The Information the Leader Needs

Drucker said he "looked out the window" and noticed what was going on in order to predict the future. When asked how this worked, he answered, "I listen." After a dramatic pause of a couple of seconds, he

Drucker on Staffing

Drucker suggested the following decision steps to help leaders in their staffing decisions:

1. Think through the assignment so that you understand what needs to be done.
2. Look at a number of potentially qualified people.
3. Decide who can actually do the job best, ignoring irrelevant weaknesses.
4. Discuss each of the candidates with several people who have actually worked with them.
5. Make certain that the appointee understands the job.

added, "to myself." Pressed on this issue, Drucker answered that you had to go one step further and ask yourself what the things you had seen or heard would mean for the future. Thus, leaders need to observe what is going on, and then take the additional step of analyzing this information and deciding what is likely to happen as a result of what has taken place.

Drucker recognized that analyzing only internal information — cash flow, liquidity, productivity, competency, resource allocation and so on — was useful only as a short-term tactic. Drucker knew that strategy of any sort had to be based on information about "markets, customers and non-customers; about technology in one's own industry and others; about worldwide finance; and about the changing world economy."

Methodology: Developing Drucker-Based Strategies

Although Drucker never revealed his methodology for developing strategy as a step-by-step process, the following 10 principles have been developed from his work:

1. Commit fully to a definite objective.
2. Seize the initiative and keep it.
3. Economize to mass your resources.
4. Use strategic positioning.
5. Do the unexpected.
6. Keep things simple.
7. Prepare multiple simultaneous alternatives.
8. Take the indirect route to your objective.
9. Practice timing and sequencing.
10. Exploit your success.

To develop strategy, Drucker saw that three elements — the principles of strategy, the resources of the firm

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and what he called the “fixed certainties” — needed to be brought together.

Taking Action: What It Takes to Implement Your Plan

Implementing your plan means initiating and putting your plans into action. As with any project, your strategic plan needs leadership and management. This requires that tasks be broken down, assigned and scheduled. Resources must be allocated, performance expectations defined, metrics established, and a system for periodic and ad hoc reviews and feedback implemented. In short, as leader you are responsible for and must implement the plan.

To do this, a leader needs controls, which, according to Drucker, have three major characteristics. They can be neither objective nor neutral; need to focus on results; and must consider measurable and non-measurable events.

Both choosing the correct metrics and making the correct decisions about them are incredibly important to achieving any goal, whether strategic or everyday. ●

Part Two: Ethics and Personal Integrity

Drucker saw strategic planning as the foundation of leadership for all organizations, and ethics and personal integrity as necessary conditions for successfully building this foundation. In his earliest writings on the subject, he stated that leadership was exercised through character, and though followers might forgive a leader much, they would not forgive a lack of integrity.

Drucker believed social responsibility was part of a leader’s ethical behavior, but cautioned that, under certain conditions, what was considered a corporation’s social responsibility should not be undertaken and was unethical. Drucker’s positions form the basis of his ideas about leadership.

Drucker believed that leaders should adopt the following two concepts into their personal philosophy of ethics:

1. The ethics of personal responsibility from the physician Hippocrates: “*Primum non nocere*,” which translates as “above all [or first] do no harm.”
2. The mirror test: What kind of person do I want to see when I look into the mirror every morning?

Effective Leadership and Personal Integrity

Drucker made a clear distinction between the law and

personal integrity. Personal integrity, he felt, had to be a part of everything that a leader did; without it, leaders had no legitimacy and their followers would eventually desert them. He wrote, “In military training, the first rule is to instill soldiers with trust in their officers, because without trust they won’t fight.”

The need for personal integrity is integral to all of Drucker’s views of leadership. Integrity means adherence to a moral code; particularly, adherence to such a code under all conditions and regardless of whether anyone knows it. To Drucker, integrity is critical because “the spirit of an organization is created by the people at the top.” The proof that leaders mean what they say is uncompromising integrity of character, which permeates through the organization.

The Seven Deadly Sins of Leadership

Drucker counseled leaders to avoid these Seven Deadly Sins of Leadership:

1. The Sin of Pride. Generalized pride — as opposed to being proud of specific things — is the most serious leadership sin because it can easily lead to the other six.

2. The Sin of Lust. In any workplace, this sin creates jealousies, feelings of favoritism and lack of trust, damaging people, relationships and more.

3. The Sin of Greed. This is a sin of excess. Leaders have power and, unfortunately, having power has a tendency to lead to corruption.

4. The Sin of Sloth. The sin of sloth is often an unwillingness to do work the leader considers beneath the dignity of the office.

5. The Sin of Wrath. Leaders need to avoid repeated and uncontrolled anger because it can damage their leadership and destroy morale.

6. The Sin of Envy. With the sin of envy, the leader is envious of what is enjoyed by someone else. This sin usually leads the leader to make decisions and to take actions that will harm the object of the envy.

7. The Sin of Gluttony. Drucker drew a parallel between high executive salaries and the demands of unions for more and more benefits without an increase in productivity. He said we would pay a terrible price for these examples of gluttony and that it is never pleasant to watch hogs gorge.

Effective Leadership and Corporate Social Responsibility

Drucker recognized and was one of the first to teach that people were not a cost — they were a resource. In

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his view, workers in and out of the workplace were as much the responsibility of the corporate leader as profits, survival and growth of the business or organization. Social responsibility and leadership went hand in hand.

As Drucker saw it, even a company's negative impacts could and should be examined to turn, if possible, something that the company was doing that was causing harm into something positive. He saw that in the early 1920s, DuPont, a major chemical company, set out to eliminate some of the poisonous and unwanted byproducts of its manufacturing. In the process, it invented a new system of toxic control that was so successful it was developed as a separate business. Yes, it is the old lemons-into-lemonade idea, but it has been very successful for the companies attempting it.

The Responsibility of a Corporation: First, Do No Harm

Drucker summarized what he expected from the leader with *primum non nocere*; in plain English, "above all, do no harm."

Frequently, well-intentioned acts of leaders can do precisely what Drucker cautioned against. The harm done can be much greater than the good originally sought.

Moreover, Drucker taught that good intentions were not, in themselves, socially responsible. When social responsibilities are undertaken that hurt the organization's ability to accomplish its mission, the resulting harm is the reverse of social responsibility. ●

Part Three: The Military: Drucker's Model Organization

One of Drucker's five components of effective leadership had to do with following the recommendations of a classic book on military leadership.

Drucker believed that the best book on leadership was written almost two and a half millennia ago by Xenophon, a Greek general who had fought in Persia. In *Kyropaidia*, Xenophon wrote about leadership in battle. Thus, the "Father of Modern Management" recommended a book on combat leadership as the best book written on leadership for business leaders, simply because it taught good leadership.

Leadership Lessons From Xenophon

After becoming commander and creating subordinate generals, Xenophon called the new generals together and instructed them on leadership. He said:

1. Leaders set the example.
2. Leaders need to be braver than those they lead and must be the first to do hard work.
3. Leaders must be in control and exercise discipline, otherwise nothing useful ever gets done.
4. Leaders train their soldiers to think about positive action that each must take to be successful, otherwise they think about "what is going to happen to me?"

The basis of leadership about which Xenophon wrote, the lessons of his experiences, the principles of integrity, commitment, duty and other concepts, are in no way altered by even the most recent research on leadership. Whatever the leadership challenges in whatever organization, much can be learned from Xenophon's experiences and writings.

Training and Developing Leaders

Drucker came to appreciate that not only was leadership learnable, it was up to the organization to teach these skills.

Drucker cautioned not to focus only on skills for the immediate future, but to build for the leader's entire career and life. He emphasized that mentoring and training, both theoretical and practical, are critical in that they focus on what the developing leader is doing right rather than what had been done wrong. He quoted the pastor of a church from which many successful leaders had emerged, who tried to provide four things to newly developing leaders:

- A mentor for guidance.
- A teacher to develop skills.
- A judge to evaluate progress.
- An encourager to cheer them on.

This is a good description of how the military develops leaders and how any organization can and should develop them as well.

Promotion and Staffing

Drucker argued strongly for a rational system of promotion. He recognized that undeserved promotion not only resulted in higher incidences of failure and mediocrity, it also tremendously de-motivated both those more deserving who were passed over and those who simply observed dysfunctional management promotion decisions. He cautioned against two common errors: promotion to get rid of someone performing poorly and failure to promote someone considered indispensable in a current position. Finally, he listed several characteristics of a rational system:

- Consideration of all eligibles, not just those highly

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visible.

- Consideration of all functional backgrounds.
- Normal promotion from within, but consideration of desirable outsiders.

The Heart of Leadership

If you follow these eight universal laws, your chances of leadership success are much increased:

1. **Maintain absolute integrity.** Drucker said, “A leader can be well-liked and popular and even competent and that’s all well and good, but if he lacks integrity of character he is not fit to be a leader.”
2. **Know your stuff.** Drucker wrote, “Leadership rests on being able to do something others cannot do at all or find difficult to do.”
3. **Declare your expectations.** Drucker wrote: “Each manager, from the ‘big boss’ down to the production foreman or the chief clerk, needs clearly spelled out objectives ...”
4. **Show uncommon commitment.** Drucker said, “Commitment comes from a worthy mission and then strong commitment.”
5. **Expect positive results.** “One cannot be negative and succeed in anything,” Drucker explained.
6. **Take care of your people.** Drucker wrote: “A leader has responsibility to his subordinates, to his associates.”
7. **Put duty before self.** Leaders have a duty to accomplish the mission and a duty to take care of those for whom they are responsible. Addressing a leader’s own needs must come only after fulfilling this duty.
8. **Get out in front.** “... as junior leader or as CEO the leader must be where the work is the most challenging,” Drucker said. ●

Part Four: Motivation and Leadership

Although he continued thinking and writing about motivation over the years, Drucker did not make a connection between motivation and leadership, probably because he did not attempt to unify his theories of leadership until relatively late in his career. Yet Drucker did list *motivating* as one of the “basic operations” of a manager’s work.

Leadership Style as a Motivator

Douglas McGregor was a professor at the MIT Sloan

School of Management. McGregor concluded that managers led by one of only two general theories of motivation. Leaders following Theory X (which closely resembled the carrot-and-stick approach) assumed that employees primarily work for money or when threatened with punishment and will avoid work if possible. As a result, such employees must be closely supervised and controlled, using incentives to reward those who perform adequately and punishment for those who do not.

Theory Y leaders’ assumptions and style of leadership were quite different. They assumed that employees were ambitious, self-motivated and eager to accept greater responsibility for work outcome, if only encouraged and allowed to do so. Tight control and supervision was not the way to motivate them. In fact, it was counterproductive.

Drucker agreed that Theory X was not the final answer. Drucker’s “knowledge workers,” equipped with brainpower and a constantly expanding universe of intellectual and experiential resources, were increasingly needed for the organization to be competitive. Drucker concluded that the carrot-and-stick approach no longer worked for knowledge workers and, in developed countries, it didn’t work for manual workers either.

Each worker must be treated differently, and there are times when each must be treated differently from his or her norm. Without this, the organization will never achieve the maximum productivity sought.

Motivating to Peak Performance

The goal and outcome must be *outstanding performance*, achieved, of course, through worker responsibility.

Drucker said a leader must create “a responsible worker,” and suggested four ways to accomplish this task. These aren’t alternative approaches; all four must be used to achieve the desired results:

1. **Place workers carefully.** Drucker taught that a systematic, serious and continual effort to put people in the right jobs was a prerequisite to high motivation.
2. **Demand high standards of performance.** For peak performance, workers need work that engages and challenges their abilities and motivates them with high standards.
3. **Provide the worker with information needed.** Only with information can workers control, measure and guide themselves to reaching the goal and accepting complete responsibility for it.
4. **Encourage managerial vision.** Drucker’s main

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reason for encouraging managerial vision had to do with workers' seeing their work as contributing to the survival or success of the enterprise.

Charisma as a Motivator

Drucker was not a fan of charisma, despite its known power to motivate. He wrote, "Indeed, charisma becomes the undoing of leaders. It makes them inflexible, convinced of their own infallibility, unable to change." Yet, in writing about what effective managers should do, Drucker provided a description that closely parallels many of the actions of charismatic leaders.

Drucker recommended that the leader motivate by actions clearly characteristic of a charismatic leader:

- Lead, don't manage.
- Know who you are leading.
- Treat each individual differently depending on what motivates each.
- Treat groups differently depending on what motivates each.
- Lead individuals and groups differently, at different times, depending on the situation.
- Remember that those led need to know the organization's mission and believe in it.

The Volunteer Paradigm

Drucker spent the last 15 to 20 years of his life focused on nonprofit organizations, many of which had more volunteers than paid employees. From his experience with these organizations and their members, he formulated a concept that he articulated in the book *Management Challenges for the 21st Century*, where he stated that full-time employees must be managed as if they were volunteers.

He reasoned that the workplace, even in non-volunteer-staffed corporations, had changed to such an extent that a complete makeover in how workers were treated and motivated was needed.

He noted that pay was no longer the main motivator except under extreme economic circumstances. "We have known for 50 years that money alone does not motivate to perform," he wrote.

Change was necessary because, unlike their counterparts in the past, knowledge workers had mobility; they could leave one firm and go elsewhere with relative ease. Moreover, they had their own means of production, that is, their knowledge. From these facts, Drucker concluded that what motivates unpaid volunteers should be used to motivate regular full-time employees. ●

Part Five: The Marketing Model of Leadership

Drucker stated unequivocally that leadership was "a marketing job"; however, he did little to develop this concept.

Modern marketing rests on something called the "marketing concept." The basis of the marketing concept is that firms should seek to discover and then satisfy the needs of their customers rather than persuade customers to purchase existing products or services in which they might not be interested. Since Drucker taught that if marketing were done perfectly, selling would be unnecessary, to practice marketing correctly, it would be necessary to understand the needs of each group or customer segment, including their values and behaviors, so as to approach them in their preferred manner and allow them to relate to the product or service without interference. In Drucker's terms, if the marketing aspect of leadership were done perfectly, the persuasion element would be unnecessary.

Applying Marketing to Leadership

The marketing concept states that organizations must analyze the needs of their customers and then make better decisions than their competitors' to satisfy those needs.

Certain elements are required, including focusing on the buyers and satisfying their individual wants and needs, viewing the entire organization as part of marketing, supporting the marketing effort, having what the buyers want and attending to the welfare of both the buyers and society. This is the ideal. When organizations fall short, marketing is deemed less than optimal and, in the case of lapses in considering buyer or societal welfare, even unethical or illegal. One can easily say the same about leadership.

Leaders must begin with a mission they believe in, one that is believable by those they lead. Making this mission believable, communicating and promoting it, is a continual process. At the same time, leaders must proceed to developing the strategies to reach the goals and objectives required to achieve, communicate and promote that believable mission.

Applying Segmentation to Leadership

The marketing concept of segmentation coincides with Drucker's belief that human beings are different and must be treated differently.

The concept of appealing to different groups in their preferred way and in accordance with their interests is

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correct. However, the leader must be careful to maintain a consistent story, even if the story is presented with a different emphasis to different groups. What a leader or marketer says or promises can't change with different groups or the leader loses credibility.

The basic idea of one-on-one segmentation is to concentrate on providing services or products to one customer at a time by identifying and then meeting his or her individual needs. It then aims to repeat this many times with each customer, thereby forging powerful life-long relationships. One-on-one segmentation is a near-perfect example of segmentation and the marketing approach to leadership.

Applying Positioning to the Organization and the Leader

The marketing concept of positioning has to do with the communication process and how to use that process effectively to persuade a target audience.

To develop your position or to reposition yourself or your organization, you must start with two vital pieces of information:

- Where are you now?
- Where do you want to be?

It is critical that you be congruent with the position you want to occupy.

Drucker wrote that leadership is marketing because he knew that leadership dealt with people and influencing them to achieve their maximum potential. He knew that this could not be accomplished without communication. The concept of positioning is cutting-edge communication technology for the leader.

The Role of Influence and Persuasion on Strategy and Tactics

The basic difference between *influence* and *persuasion* is that influence is an act that produces an effect without apparent effort, whereas persuasion requires effort to produce a desired effect. In both cases, an effect is sought.

Influence and persuasion focus primarily on the tactical implementation of both marketing and leadership, but they affect decisions at the strategic level as well. As leadership tactics, direction and permissiveness are corollaries to influence and persuasion.

A leader who is thinking ahead rather than responding to a problem must first consider the environment in which these alternatives will be implemented at the tactical level, which makes it part of a strategic decision. ●

Ten Ways to Motivate Employees

Here are the top 10 factors employees consider most important in their jobs and therefore what motivates them to peak performance:

1. Work with people who treat me with respect.
2. Interesting work.
3. Recognition for good work.
4. Chance to develop skills.
5. Work for people who listen if you have ideas about how to do things better.
6. Chance to think for myself rather than just carry out instructions.
7. Seeing the end results of my work.
8. Working for efficient managers.
9. A job that is not too easy.
10. Feeling well informed about what is going on.

Epilogue: Drucker's Legacy

Drucker was passionately devoted to his profession. He did not quit thinking, analyzing and perfecting his powerful ideas and concepts because he never considered them complete and finished. As he wrote, "Anyone who continues to do what made him successful in the past is doomed to failure." Times change; new technologies are developed.

Although Drucker asserts that the basics of leadership haven't changed over the millennia and that Xenophon's book on leadership written 2,000 years ago is still the best, not all of Drucker's vision can be applied without first adapting it to present conditions.

Much of Drucker's work on leadership must be continued by others. Hopefully others will seek to continue his legacy through further development of his work, especially on leadership — the most important aspect of management. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *Drucker on Leadership*, you'll also like:

1. ***The 360 Degree Leader* by John C. Maxwell.** Maxwell teaches you how to develop your influence regardless of your position in an organization.
2. ***What Got You Here Won't Get You There* by Marshall Goldsmith.** Goldsmith details the 20 subtle nuances that make the difference between reaching a plateau and reaching the top.
3. ***Winning* by Jack Welch with Suzy Welch.** Management legend Welch address his own management techniques honed during his tenure as CEO of General Electric.