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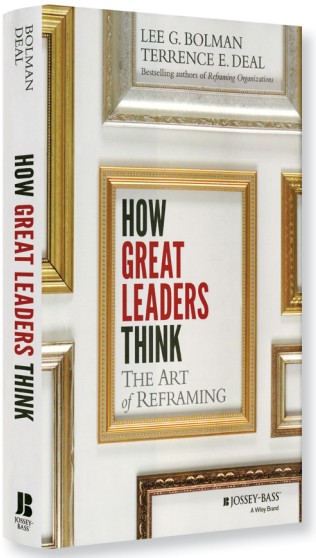
How Great Leaders Think

The Art of Reframing



by Lee G. Bolman
Terrence E. Deal

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Why do some leaders succeed where others fail? What did Steve Jobs have that his predecessor lacked when Apple's board brought him back to save the company in 1997? What magic did Howard Schultz bring when he returned after an eight-year hiatus to get Starbucks out of a funk? Why was an airplane guy, Alan Mulally, able to pull Ford Motor Company out of a death spiral after Henry Ford's great-grandson tried and failed?

How Great Leaders Think: The Art of Reframing uses compelling, contemporary examples to show how better thinking is the key to better leadership. Leaders who can reframe capture a sharper image of what's going on around them and understand what they need to do to achieve the results they want. Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal's influential four-frame model of leadership and organizations offers leaders an accessible template for understanding four major dimensions of organizational life: structure, people, politics and culture.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to use structural tools to organize teams and organizations for better results.
- Techniques to build morale by aligning organizations and people.
- Strategies to map the political terrain and build a power base to navigate the partisan struggles in organizations.
- How to develop a leadership story that shapes culture, provides meaning and inspires people toward a shared purpose.

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: **HOW GREAT LEADERS THINK**

by Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal

The author: Lee G. Bolman holds the Marion Block Missouri Chair in Leadership at the Bloch School of Management, University of Missouri-Kansas City. He is the co-author of the best-selling book *Reframing Organizations*.

Terrence E. Deal is the founder of the Deal Leadership Institute and has served on the faculties of Stanford, Harvard, Vanderbilt and the University of Southern California. He is the author or co-author of 27 books, including the best-seller *Corporate Cultures*, as well as numerous articles on organizations, change and leadership.

PART I: LEADERSHIP IN FOUR DIMENSIONS

Introduction: The Power of Reframing

Intelligence, talent and experience are all vital qualities for leadership, but they're not enough. They don't make the difference between success and failure. It's commonplace for business, once successful, to go into a funk. Then they need a turnaround because the smart, experienced people in charge who know the place better than anyone else have failed. The usual solution is to bring in an outsider with a stellar track record, but that approach doesn't always work. It all depends on how a leader thinks.

Framing

Neuroscientists now tell us that believing is seeing rather than the reverse. The human brain constructs its own images of reality and then projects them onto the external world. Reality is what each of us believes it to be: Beliefs come first; explanations for beliefs follow. Our mental models — rich or impoverished — determine the breadth and depth of our personal reality. How you think determines what you see and how you respond to situations.

There are many labels for such mental models: maps, paradigms, mindsets, worldviews and cognitive lenses, to name a few. We call them frames. A frame is a set of beliefs and assumptions that you carry in your head to help you understand and negotiate some part of your world.

Four Leadership Frames

There are four major frames — structural, human resource, political and symbolic. Books, articles and training programs typically present one frame or another, isolated from the others. Such single-lens views are exactly what get people in trouble and frustrate other leaders.

Each of the frames has its own image of reality. Multiframe thinking requires moving beyond narrow, mechanical approaches for understanding organizations.

PART II: STRUCTURAL LEADERSHIP

Getting Organized

Some leaders pay little attention to structure, either because they don't understand it or because they don't see it as very interesting or important. Social architecture has been a fundamental underpinning for many successful leaders. Leaders savvy about structure reason that even in the smallest work situation, people need to know what they're supposed to do, how to work with one another and who is in charge of what. Otherwise, confusion, finger-pointing and conflict undermine even the noblest of intentions.

As a leader, you continually choose how to decode the circumstances you face. You can choose to emphasize or ignore structure, to make it central or unimportant.

Elements of Social Architecture

Every structure is designed and crafted using a particular configuration of basic elements. One is the hierarchy

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Rebecca S. Clement, Publisher; **Sarah T. Dayton**, Editor in Chief; **Ashleigh Imus**, Senior Editor; **Masiel Tejada**, Graphic Designer; **Andrew B. Clancy**, Executive Editor

of authority, or chain of command, typically with three levels: executive, managerial and operational. Authority for making decisions can be concentrated at any of the three levels. A second element is the division of labor.

Managers also have to decide how to group individuals into work units. Once authority is established and roles and responsibilities defined, structural design needs to provide ways to link the parts together. The challenge is to develop an appropriate mix of vertical and lateral coordination:

Those at higher levels provide vertical coordination by exercising authority, setting policy and strategy, and establishing planning and control systems.

Lateral coordination happens through a variety of formal and informal roles, meetings and groups. Individuals in coordinating roles have diplomatic license to span boundaries across specialized groups and areas. Matrix structures cross business and product lines.

Contextual Factors

Tinkering with structural arrangements requires a clear understanding of your situation. In developing the right social architecture to fit specific conditions, every organization needs to respond to basic contextual factors:

Size and age. Organizations become more complex and formal as they get bigger and older.

Core process. Simple, top-down structures work for stable and predictable tasks but not for more complex and turbulent ones.

Environment. Stable environments reward simpler structures; uncertain, chaotic conditions require a more complex, flexible structure.

Strategy and goals. Top-down structures work better with consistent, well-defined goals; more ambiguous goals and strategies usually work better with more flexible, decentralized structures.

Information technology. Information technology permits flatter, more flexible and more decentralized structures.

Nature of the workforce. More educated and professional workers need and want greater autonomy and discretion.

Applying the Structural Frames

Managers often try to fix problems by fixing the people, but miss structural solutions that are more effective and easier to implement. Three simple questions can help guide a structural analysis:

1. What's going on? What's working and not working?
2. What's changing (in your organization, your technology or your environment) that creates an opportunity, a threat or both.
3. What problem do you need to solve? What options should you consider?

Understanding the complexity and variety of design possibilities can help you create patterns and prototypes that work for rather than against both your people and your purposes.

Organizing Groups and Teams

Organizations depend on groups and teams to do much of their work, but teams often founder on structural flaws. A team's structure may come from the top initially but often needs to evolve locally to meet the challenges of the game, the work at hand.

In developing a team structure, a basic consideration is the nature of the work to be accomplished. Tasks vary in clarity, predictability and stability. Simple tasks align well with basic structures. More complicated projects generally require more complex structure. But when a situation becomes exceptionally ambiguous and fast-paced, particularly when time pressure is high, reverting to more centralized authority often works best. Without a structure aligned to the work, performance and morale suffer, and troubles multiply.

Leadership becomes even more critical in self-managing teams, which many see as the structure of the future. Such teams plan, assign tasks and roles, schedule, make decisions and solve problems on their own. Self-managing teams usually need help getting started, and work best when they have a clear sense of what game they're playing and how success is defined.

PART III: HUMAN RESOURCE LEADERSHIP

Leading People

For most of management history, standard practice has been to treat employees like pawns to be moved where needed and sacrificed when necessary.

That attitude explains why so much of the public thinks of bosses as selfish, heartless tyrants. In an era of high unemployment and economic distress, elites in every sector are suspect, and the idea of sacrificing people for profits persists as a popular view of the workplace. The human resource frame offers a much more positive and productive way to think about people.

Hiring the right people. At Brazilian manufacturing company Semco, Ricardo Semler studied managers who

failed. He realized they often were technically capable but lacking in leadership talent. In response, he developed a system in which subordinates rated their bosses on both technical ability and leadership.

Keeping them. To attract the right people, progressive companies reward generously and share the business profits. To retain loyal and hardworking employees, they protect jobs and promote from within.

Investing in people. Semco understands that undertrained workers cause harm by delivering shoddy quality, poor service and costly mistakes.

Sustaining power to the people. Semco took democratic decision making to a level few companies have ever contemplated. Workers began to design production processes and products, approve or veto new businesses, set production quotas and set their own hours and pay.

All would be well if leaders understood themselves and others. Unfortunately, that's not always the case.

Seeing Ourselves as Others See Us

One of the most basic and pervasive causes of leadership failure is interpersonal blindness. Many leaders simply don't know their impact on other people. Even worse, they don't know that they don't know. They assume that other people see them pretty much the way they see themselves; then they blame others when things go wrong.

Self-Awareness

Leaders develop self-awareness through ongoing learning about their actions and their impact on others. It's hard to know how others see you unless they tell you.

If you understand a few basic principles of interpersonal feedback, you can accelerate your own learning and perhaps improve others' as well.

1. **Ask and you shall receive.** People are reluctant to tell us more than we want to know. Persistence and specificity make your requests clear and credible.
2. **Say thank you.** Be sure to thank anyone who tries to help. If you respond to a gift by rejecting it, criticizing it or inducing guilt, the flow of future offerings will dry up fast.
3. **Ask before giving.** When someone doesn't want feedback, catching him or her off guard will usually breed suspicion and defensiveness rather than listening.
4. **When asked, give your best.** Resist the temptation to offer reassuring platitudes, but don't jump to the opposite extreme of brutal confrontation.
5. **Tell the truth.** This is familiar advice that almost everyone endorses and almost everyone violates. The primary barrier is fear. We'd say what we think — if we weren't afraid of the consequences.

Leadership Skills: Advocacy and Inquiry

It's easy to see that leaders need to communicate clearly and persuasively to advocate effectively on behalf of their mission and constituents. But many leaders fail to recognize that they also need to be good at inquiry. Probing with questions and observation enables them to learn from experience and to acquire information they need if they are to understand what's going on.

PART IV: POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

The Leader as Politician

Every group and organization is political, for two reasons: (1) individuals and groups have divergent interests and values, and (2) they live in a world of scarce resources. It is impossible for everybody to get everything they want.

Political Skills

The leader as politician needs to master at least four key skills: agenda setting, mapping the political terrain, networking and forming coalitions, and bargaining and negotiating.

Setting agendas. You need to understand how key constituents think and what they care about to ensure that your agenda meshes with their concerns.

Mapping the political terrain. A simple way to develop a political map for any situation is to create a two-dimensional diagram showing players (who is in the game), power (how much clout each player is likely to wield) and interests (what each player wants).

Networking and building coalitions. The first task in building networks and coalitions is to figure out whose help you need. The second is to develop relationships so that people will be there when you need them. The political map helps pinpoint the key constituents. Once you cultivate allies, you can move to "horse trading": promising rewards in exchange for resources and support.

Bargaining and negotiation. From a political perspective, bargaining is central to decision making. How does a leader decide how to balance win-win and win-lose approaches to bargaining? At least two questions are important: How much opportunity is there for a win-win solution, and will I have to work with these people again?

Conflict plays a key role in political dealings. This makes it very difficult for leaders who prefer calm waters to

stormy seas. Unfortunately, conflict is an integral part of life in organizations.

The Leader as Warrior and Peacemaker

There are two stances leaders can adopt in handling conflict: warrior and peacemaker. These can be symbolized by Apple's Steve Jobs epitomizing the warrior and Walt Disney's Bob Iger serving as peacemaker.

Steve Jobs was an aggressive pugilist ready to slug it out for any project or cause he championed. His combat style relied more on persistence and brute force than compromise and subtlety.

Described as a leader who does more listening than talking, Iger was as sensible and solid as those around him were volatile and had a disciplined calm, which helped him deal with large egos. Iger observed, "Every negotiation needs to be resolved by compromises."

Iger and Jobs embody two basic approaches to conflict. Organizations need both. Warriors are resolute fighters who raise the heat and intensify the conflict. Peacemakers work to lower the temperature and defuse conflict in the hope of minimizing destructive, lose-lose dynamics.

The Peacemaker: Cooling the Flame

Leadership often has to challenge existing beliefs and emotional investments, asking others to review where they stand and what they know or value.

Several guidelines can help peacemakers do their work well.

Be patient. Skilled peacemakers understand that conflict resolution takes time, effort and learning.

Listen and inquire: Understand parties' interests, thinking and feelings. Inquiry and listening are critical for two reasons. One is to ensure that you understand the political map. Listening is also critical because parties who feel they have been heard and understood are better able to put emotions aside and focus on solving the problem.

Engage the parties: Put people to work. Leaders need to create arenas with rules, roles and referees and be prepared to tightly manage the exchange. When these tasks are done well, they increase the chances that participants can learn from the dialogue and find a way out of the impasse.

The Warrior: Turning Up the Heat

Leaders often need to confront conflict head-on rather than fear it and back away. Both modern research on leadership and ancient wisdom on strategy teach that successful warriors combine four basic ingredients: spirit, mind, skill and power. Four guidelines can help leaders achieve victory in combat:

Fight with passion and persistence — or avoid combat. Passion energizes, sustains courage and fuels persistence.

Out-think opponents — win with a better game plan. It is foolish to go into combat without knowing what you are fighting for and what price you are willing to pay. Once your purpose is clear, you need a game plan.

Recruit and rally your team. Knowing the group psyche is vital: rallying constituents involves making an offer so attractive that they are eager to sign up.

Build and leverage a power base. The modern warrior needs social and institutional power. Four power assets are paramount: position, allies, organization and resources.

Conflict is intrinsic to leadership and can be a barrier that prevents leaders from achieving their dreams, particularly when they fear it or handle it badly. But in the hands of gifted leaders, conflict can also be a powerful lever for change.

PART V: SYMBOLIC LEADERSHIP

The Leader as Magician

As he sat at his kitchen table early one morning in February 2007, Starbucks chairman and former CEO Howard Schultz was enveloped in the gloom of the Seattle weather outside his window. When he visited individual stores, Schultz felt that something intrinsic to the Starbucks brand was missing.

Schultz began to organize his thoughts on a yellow legal pad in a handwritten memo titled "The Commoditization of the Starbucks Experience." In it, he noted recent technical advances that were undercutting key cultural values and ways.

Schultz ended the memo with a heartfelt statement: "We desperately need to get back to the core and make the changes necessary to evoke the heritage, the tradition and the passion that we all have for the true Starbucks Experience."

Schultz intended the memo as confidential food for thought for key executives, but, to his chagrin, someone leaked it. Schultz was stunned by the leak and felt pressure to do damage control. By the end of 2007, same-store sales started to show double-digit declines. Schultz and the Starbucks board agreed that he needed to return as CEO.

Barista Boot Camp

One of Schultz's first initiatives was to close all 7,100 U.S. stores for an afternoon of barista re-education. Back at headquarters, Schultz worked on renewing roots with a playful brainstorming session for key executives. A week after the stores closed for barista training, Schultz convened the top 200 Starbucks execs from around the world for a hands-on, interactive three-day leadership summit.

Schultz's package of symbolic initiatives helped to refocus Starbucks' strategy and re-energize its people. From losses in late 2008, Starbucks rebounded to record revenues ($10.7 billion) and profits ($1.4 billion) two years later, while retaining its place on Fortune's list of the 100 best companies to work for and expanding its efforts to become greener and provide more support to coffee growers.

The Ways of Magic: How Symbolic Leaders Work

Leaders like Howard Schultz lead through both actions and words; they interpret experience to impart meaning and purposes through phrases of beauty and passion.

Symbolic leaders respect and use history. If leaders assume that history starts with their arrival, they typically misread their circumstances and alienate their constituents. Wise leaders attend to history and link their initiatives to the values, stories and heroes of the past.

Symbolic leaders interpret experience. In a world of uncertainty and ambiguity, a key function of symbolic leadership is to offer plausible and hopeful interpretations of experience.

Symbolic leaders develop and communicate a hopeful vision. One powerful way in which a leader can interpret experience is by distilling and disseminating a persuasive and hopeful image of the future. A vision needs to address both the challenges of the present and hopes and values of followers.

Symbolic leaders convene rituals and ceremonies. Rituals and ceremonies are special times in the life of a group or organization. During such occasions, people swap stories, renew ties to one another and recommit to cultural values.

Seeking Soul in Teams

Teams often fall short because they come together rationally but not spiritually. Uncommon spirit — or soul — is often the key ingredient of wildly successful teams or "hot groups."

Leadership is often viewed as the work of extraordinary individuals, but in great groups, leadership is almost always shared and fluid. Leadership initially focuses on assembling individuals with the right stuff and building powerful cultural bonds that inspire and sustain team members through the ups and downs of challenging work.

The Eagle Group: Reasons for Success

The Soul of a New Machine is Tracy Kidder's dazzling yearlong account of a small group of engineers at Data General who, in the 1970s, created a new computer in record time. Despite scant resources and limited support, the Eagle Group outperformed all other Data General divisions to produce a new state-of-the-art machine. The technology is now antiquated, but lessons from how the team pulled it off are as current and useful as ever.

Signing up. Joining a team involves more than a rational decision. It is a mutual choice marked by some form of ritual.

Leadership diversity as a competitive advantage. Leadership diversity among the Eagle Group's top engineers was channeled into specialized functions. Understandably, there was tension among these leadership roles and subgroups. Harnessing the resulting energy pulled the parts into a cohesive team.

Example, not command. The group itself had some rules but paid little attention to them. Subtle and implicit signals rather than concrete and explicit guidelines or decisions held the group together and directed it toward a common purpose.

Specialized language. Every unified group develops words, phrases and metaphors unique to its circumstances. A specialized language both reflects and shapes a group's culture. Shared language allows team members to communicate easily with minimal misunderstanding. A shared language binds a group together and is a visible sign of membership.

Building a Soulful Team

After extensive research on high-performing groups, Peter Vaill concluded that spirit was at the core of every group he studied. Members of such groups consistently "felt the spirit," a feeling essential to the meaning and value of their work.

PART VI: IMPROVING LEADERSHIP PRACTICE

Reframing in Action

Most leadership challenges can be framed in more than one way, and every turn of the kaleidoscope offers a different image of the problems and possibilities.

The frames are powerful because of their ability to spur imagination and generate new insights and options. But each frame has limits as well as strengths, and each can be applied well or poorly.

Benefits and Risks of Reframing

The essence of reframing is examining the same situation from multiple vantage points. Each lens offers distinctive advantages, but each has its blind spots and shortcomings.

The structural frame risks ignoring everything that falls outside the rational scope of tasks, procedures, policies and organization charts. Structural thinking can overestimate the power of authority and underestimate the authority of power.

Adherents of the human resource frame sometimes cling to a romanticized view of human nature in which everyone hungers for growth and collaboration. Human resource enthusiasts can be overly optimistic about integrating individual and organizational needs while neglecting structure and the stubborn realities of conflict and scarcity.

The political frame captures dynamics that other frames miss, but has its own limits. Political action is too often interpreted as amoral scheming.

The symbolic frame offers powerful insight into fundamental issues of meaning and belief as well as possibilities for shaping people into a cohesive group with a shared mission. But its concepts are also elusive; effectiveness depends on the artistry of the user.

Leaders can harness frames as scenarios, or scripts, to generate unique approaches to challenging circumstances. In planning for a high-stakes meeting or a tense encounter, they can imagine and experiment with novel ways to play their roles.

Leadership and Change

You're better off seeing quicksand before you're mired in it. Likewise, your chances of success are enhanced when you use the frames to help you see pitfalls and roadblocks in the road ahead. It rarely works to retrain people without revising roles or to revamp roles without retraining. Planning without broad-based participation that gives voice to political opposition is likely to provoke stiff resistance. Change alters power relationships and undermines existing agreements and pacts. Even more profoundly, it intrudes on deeply rooted symbolic forms, traditional ways and rituals.

Resurrection at Ford Motor

As Ford Motor Company was chalking up a $13 billion loss in 2006, chairman William Ford III reluctantly concluded that, hard as he had tried, he was failing in his efforts to save the company his great-grandfather had founded. He went in search of a seasoned leader smart enough to figure out where Ford needed to go and tough enough to take on the infighting and entrenched mindsets among executives and divisions that had defeated Bill Ford's best efforts. Eventually, he set his sights on Alan Mulally, the number-two executive at Boeing.

Mulally quickly concluded that Ford needed a major overhaul of a "convoluted management structure riddled with overlapping responsibilities and tangled chains of command."

To reach the thousands of employees beyond Detroit, Mulally traveled to locations around the world, asking questions and reinforcing the message that Ford was coming back. He issued every employee a wallet card that carried the essence of the plan going forward: "One Ford. One Team. One Plan. One Goal."

"One Ford" may sound simple, even simplistic, but for Mulally it was a powerful mantra and polestar. It meant replacing chaos, parochialism and political infighting with simplicity, teamwork and unity — worldwide.

Mulally's efforts worked, though more slowly than he had initially hoped. Just as Ford began to turn the corner, the recession of 2008 devastated the auto industry worldwide. But two years later, the economic crisis forced both General Motors and Chrysler to beg for U.S. government bailouts to stay in business. Ford had the cushion it needed to avoid taking taxpayers' money. That became a huge marketing edge. After losing market share for 13 straight years, Ford gained share in 2009, turned a profit in 2010, and achieved its highest profits in more than a decade in 2011.

Searching for Soul: Leadership Ethics

The frames or leadership lenses help leaders think better and make better decisions. But many of the decisions they face require choosing among imperfect options. What ethical ideals will inform your leadership tasks of thinking and doing? What ethical ideals will inform your leadership? Every leader and organization needs to choose and commit to personal and collective ethical principles. Each frame implies both a central value and a leadership "gift" that can help breathe soul into an organization's daily life.

The Factory: Excellence and Authorship. The structural frame, with its emphasis on finding the right design for the task at hand, implies a value of excellence. Critical for creating and maintaining excellence is the gift of authorship. Authorship turns the classic organizational pyramid on its side and provides space within boundaries.

The Family: Caring and Love. Caring begins with knowing; it requires listening, understanding and accepting. It progresses through a deepening sense of appreciation, respect and ultimately love.

The Jungle: Justice and Power. Justice is often hard to define, and disagreement about its application is inevitable. The key gift that leaders can offer in pursuit of justice is power — the capacity for constituents to make a difference in things they care about.

The Temple: Faith and Significance. Leaders can build and sustain meaning by fostering faith in an organization and its work. Significance is partly about the work itself but even more about how the work is embraced.

Ethics ultimately must be rooted in soul: an organization's commitment to its deeply rooted identity, beliefs and values. Each leadership lens offers a perspective on the ethical responsibilities of organizations and the moral authority of leaders. The frames offer spiritual guidelines for the quest.

Great Leaders, Great Stories

As you think, so shall you lead. Much of the literature on leadership focuses on the style, attributes or actions of leaders. But thinking needs to precede action. Otherwise, action is a shot in the dark by mindless leaders who haven't thought enough about why they are choosing one path or another. The quality of leaders' thinking depends ultimately on the stories they tell. Leaders live within the stories they have created and invite others to join them on the adventure.

Worldviews, Frames and Stories

A leader appears, bringing a worldview and a personal story to a particular time and place. The setting provides a context with its own organizational story. The leader's worldview and personal story influence how she responds to the organization's story. However she makes sense of the organization's story and circumstances, she constructs a narrative to guide her and the organization going forward. Then she asks constituents to become participants in a shared story.

We can think of a leader's worldview as containing four key elements that influence how he or she makes sense of the world:

1. **Concepts and categories.** What's out there? What are the ideas and things I might notice and pay attention to?
2. **Beliefs.** How do things work? What actions lead to what outcomes?
3. **Values.** What's good or bad? What's important or not?
4. **Self-image.** Who am I? What do I care about? What are my leadership strengths and weaknesses?

The Leader's Story

Consciously or not, leaders create a personal leadership story to guide their work, a story built over the course of a lifetime's experience. Organizations also fabricate a story gleaned from their past and adapted to present circumstances. Some organizations maintain connections to their roots; others lose contact and become rootless.

As new leaders assume their roles, a dialogue opens, an interplay between the leader's story and that of the organization. New questions come to the surface:

1. **Where have we been?**
2. **Where are we now?**
3. **Where should we go from here?**
4. **How will we get there?**

Great leaders use multiple frames so as to see what they need to see and craft a story about what will work. Meanwhile, organizations have evolved their own narratives. The interplay of leaders' and organizations' stories gives rise to an emerging script that, at its best, provides a compelling image of where a group or organization is, where it needs to go and how it will get there. Bad stories often lead to disaster, but good ones conjure magic.

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *How Great Leaders Think*, you'll also like:

1. ***The Attacker's Advantage*** **by Ram Charan**. Charan provides proven tools to help leaders embrace uncertainty and develop the skills to lead.

2. ***Leadership Blindspots*** **by Robert Bruce Shaw**. Learn how to identify your weaknesses, threats and other vulnerabilities that can impair effectiveness, results and even your career.

3. ***Becoming Your Best*** **by Steven Shallenberger**. Discover the 12 principles you need to follow in order to reach your highest potential and drive the kind of innovation that turns good companies into industry leaders.