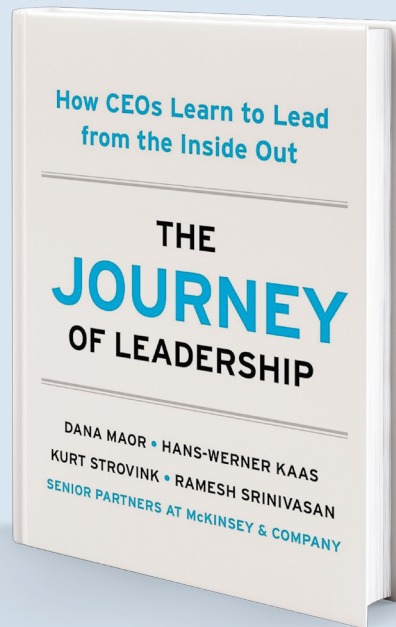


Book Snaps™

In-depth reviews of best-selling business books.



The Journey of Leadership

How CEOs Learn to Lead from the Inside Out

By Dana Maor, Hans-Werner Kaas, Kurt Strovink, and Ramesh Srinivasan

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A Book Review by Soundview

Reinvent Yourself and Your Organization

Being in a top leadership role is a goal for many, particularly those who work in the corporate world. They may hustle and acquire knowledge so they are adequately prepared for the role, or they may be stepping into the position because that is what those at their family-run company expect of them. However, what happens when leaders in those positions find themselves on shaky ground because things aren't running as they thought they should be? Or a change needs to happen, but they aren't sure how to implement it? Or they struggle with imposter syndrome?

When struggling with these difficulties, the question of "Can I do this?" or thoughts of "I don't think I'm capable of this" might arise. They may dig in their heels and cling to the ideals that CEOs have been holding onto for decades, but CEOs and leaders need to know there is encouragement to be had and a way to transform themselves into the leaders they want to be. In *The Journey of Leadership: How CEOs Learn to Lead from the Inside Out*, McKinsey & Company Senior Partners Dana Maor, Hans-Werner Kaas, Kurt Strovink, and Ramesh Srinivasan share stories, ideas and tactics for CEOs to step out of a place of struggle and doubt to one where they are able to lead with their whole selves and confidently model a positive change for the organizations they are apart of.

The authors wish to share that the best leaders are self-aware, self-reflective, and constantly working to reframe their mindset from what they previously taught. While previous teachings may have gotten them to where they are, leaders who desire to grow understand they are stuck and need to change. The Journey is composed of twelve points to help leaders grow internally and then share what they've learned to encourage their executive teams and organization. The book is divided into two sections, and each chapter is headed by a word or short phrase reflecting what is discussed for quick reference. Additionally, an appendix compiles one hundred micro-practices to become a great leader while understanding that while one micro-practice might not work for them, others will.

Throughout The Journey, the authors reference McKinsey & Company's Bower Forum. It is a program for CEO leadership development where they will come and discuss strategy, opera-

tions, and more. They want to share what each co-author has learned over the years and propose that the best leaders learn to become self-reflective and aware. The authors also want to offer the step-by-step processes laid out in this book to help struggling leaders get there. By connecting with themselves on an intimate level, leaders will be able to connect with themselves and those they work with.

Part One: It Starts with You

Many would readily acknowledge that change must begin internally before it can affect the exterior. The authors begin by directing the reader to begin with humility, understanding that others have different knowledge, skills, and gifts. This will allow for better listening and the potential for finding common ground. Those who had previously opposed others can work together more harmoniously. They can do this by realizing they don't have all the answers, humbling themselves, and working closely with others with different skill sets and opinions.

This will also require leaders to teach themselves how to listen to what is being said, not only listen so they can respond accordingly. While this may sound easy, they will soon find it is not. It is essential to set aside the need for control and be encouraged to create circles of advisors who help them see issues from all sides and adopt new perspectives.

It is important to listen well and learn to notice the nuances, such as body language, to truly understand what is or isn't being said and to understand the underlying motivation. It will also encourage those around the leader to feel the freedom to engage and share with them. No one ever wants to be the bearer of bad news, but when it comes, the leader will be in a place to receive it and hear it well.

Acknowledging Your Strengths

Leaders must also have confidence in themselves, realizing they belong in this position. They can do this by examining themselves closely, identifying their weaknesses, and attempting to change. Many people, particularly women, struggle with imposter syndrome, which is feeling like they don't belong despite evidence to the contrary. The authors propose that this can be combated by discovering their authentic selves and taking agency—showing up fully and assuming they have a seat at the table. If those placed in a leadership role were not fully qualified, they would likely not have been offered the position in the first place. With that in mind, the reader is encouraged to believe in themselves and take a hard, internal look to discover their weaknesses and how they can overcome them.

By showing up as their authentic self, leaders can confidently open doors and have conversations with those around them. They know they have worked hard to be where they deserve a seat at the table and will be able to engage well with those around them.

However, it is still wise to be mindful of oneself to avoid offending, particularly when working with people from different

backgrounds or cultures. By finding the courage to overcome their lack of confidence and being open to feedback, they can lead and contribute to their work culture in ways that make others feel seen and heard.

This can be the first step towards having the right sense of ego - knowing they can fulfill their role. They should be cautious, though, because it is easy to fall into the trap of wanting to have all the answers because of one's position. In other words, they are acting from an over-inflated ego rather than with the organization's good at the forefront. Being humble enough to surround oneself with people who question and agree with oneself is a sign of a good leader because they are willing to listen and decide what is best for all.

Excellent leaders remember to think with their organization's values first, rather than their own, for the good of all. They have the confidence to hear what others say and know that it doesn't put their credibility in question. Instead, they know that having input from those around them will help them make the best decision and move forward.

A method for making decisions can be helpful, particularly when the way forward is unclear, and changing course becomes necessary. This method will consider the organization's values, strengthen the bottom line, and create opportunities while giving the leader time to consider the basis of their decision.

While vulnerability might feel scary and counter-intuitive to the long-standing tradition of keeping a stiff upper lip at all times, it can make those who do this seem distant to those around them. Being vulnerable means sharing strengths, hopes, and convictions. It does not push others away; rather, it can be magnetic and cause trust where there was previous hesitation or doubts. The book states, however, that it is essential to keep one's triggers in mind to know how best to react to situations they face. This is where vulnerability is important because the reader can adjust their behavior accordingly and reach out for support or apologize when necessary.

Another strength for leaders to utilize on their journey is resilience. When things go awry or the unexpected happens, it is vital for the leader not to waste time asking why it happened to them and wallow in self-doubt and pity. Instead, they focus their energy on understanding the cause of what happened and how they can move forward. It also allows the reader to utilize their previously learned humility by apologizing when they make a mistake and surrounding themselves with people who can help them achieve their goals.

Failure isn't always the result of a mistake or because proper preparations didn't happen. Sometimes, it comes because of external changes that haven't been prepared for. When this happens, one should have a strategy to quiet the negative thoughts that may arise. By taking ownership of what happened, one can discover something new about oneself that will propel them forward to reach their goals.

Moving forward should come with versatility and flexibility so as to gain a wide variety of experience and exposure to



By pursuing different experiences, leaders find new opportunities and skills they can apply to their companies.”

those with different skills and knowledge sets. Today’s climate is constantly growing and shifting, and leaders face numerous disruptions, all while still having to run their companies and please their constituents. There are three ways that a leader can and should be versatile. First, by pursuing diverse experiences throughout their careers. By being constantly curious and thinking deeply about their organization and the different things involved. Finally, they master interacting with the different groups of stakeholders they come in contact with.

By pursuing different experiences, leaders find new opportunities and skills they can apply to their companies. Everyone has gaps in their skillsets, and it is up to them to find ways to fill them, particularly if they want to seek a promotion or level up their careers. They must put in the work to fill their toolbox of skills and experiences as they embark on their leadership journey.

Taking the time to think deeply does not mean that leaders know every single thing about the inner workings of their organizations. Rather, it means that they have a broad understanding of what makes it tick and what the different capabilities are. At the same time, they continue to learn new things. Ultimately, they know the hows and whys intimately, remain insatiably curious, and use that drive to have the most significant impact possible.

Knowing how to interact with peers and constituents doesn’t always mean talking and driving the conversation, although there is an emphasis on wise and effective communication. Sometimes, interacting well means staying quiet and listening and then responding. As a leader journeys on, they should create a list of procedures so they know how and when to or not to speak out on controversial issues. Ultimately, taking a public stance should only happen when it is authentic and relevant to the company. This will help leaders keep their statements’ short- and long-term effects in mind and provide an opportunity to allocate funds towards supporting the issue if needed.

As the reader reflects on the knowledge they have gained to be a more human-centric leader, they can do this with the foundation of knowing they are not the most intelligent person in the room. As they learn how to be versatile in an ever-changing world, they will have what they need to courageously pick the most critical areas for them and their organization and purpose to champion them well.

Part Two: Moving Beyond Yourself

The next part of this leadership journey involves taking the knowledge gained from the internal perspective and sharing it externally with the rest of the organization. This will help leaders apply what they have learned to bring about effective

change, beginning with embedding a strong sense of why their employees come to work.

Embedding a purpose in an organization can sometimes feel tricky or overwhelming, so it is essential to begin by defining the end goal, so everyone knows where to go and then create a plan to achieve it successfully. This should be done by considering the organization’s needs, being willing to set outrageous goals, and having a purpose for achieving them. Understanding and investing in one’s employees will help leaders achieve the level of empathy they are working towards so that everyone can grow in every aspect of their lives.

Being a successful leader does not only mean making decisions but also making bold, courageous moves when the circumstances require it. This will give them the tools to inspire their teams as they move forward together. They must inspire confidence in their teams as they make large and small changes, ensuring they are aligned with the companies. This will allow team members, particularly at the executive level, to be innovative and get the tools to keep moving forward.

The authors emphasize that fostering an organization-wide mindset shift is essential for cultural transformation. This approach will empower leaders to motivate their teams to execute plans effectively. Leaders must balance giving clear guidance and allowing their teams the freedom to innovate. Leaders can step back once every layer is aligned, enabling their teams to excel.

Taking these necessary steps on their leadership journey will also remind and encourage leaders to realize that they shouldn’t worry about the things they cannot control. Realizing that control is an illusion will give them the freedom to formulate a new strategy, oversee a technological transformation, or clarify the organization’s mandate—perhaps even the freedom to do all three. However, once they have set their priorities, they must move forward and ensure their employees have the proper resources to succeed.

This means trusting one’s team to understand the organization’s policies and goals, think deeply about the questions being asked, and allow the agency to grow, make, and learn from mistakes. The team should focus on listening well and encouraging their constituents to share their views and ideas on the tasks at hand.

Growing Together

In many organizations, there seems to be an unspoken rule about keeping certain things from those in charge, especially if it is negative. This is usually done from a place of hesitation or fear of being chastised or punished. However, the best leaders know that

it is imperative to hear the truth, even if it is uncomfortable. The book encourages readers to build relationships and connect with those in their circle so they can be spoken to truthfully.

It is the leader's job to recognize and remember that they are not the smartest people in the room and that disagreements can further the organization's goals and result in a positive outcome. They are reminded to reflect on whether they are reacting based on personal triggers and encourage their teams to do the same to mitigate the chance of negative behaviors and reactions.

It is essential to recognize the patterns that executive teams face when triggers abound, such as interrupting each other, pushing for control, withdrawing, and more. The best leaders recognize that these reactions primarily come from a place of fear and work to create a space that welcomes discussions and teaches each member how to recognize and respect the triggers. They should become closely tuned into their people's needs and passionate about creating an optimal company culture.

Leaders must allow room for mistakes and learn from them as they work towards creating this new culture. Rather than asking who was responsible, leaders are encouraged to ask questions that reflect on potentially vulnerable areas. Failure is bound to happen at some point, and leaders should see it as an opportunity to put their fear aside and engage in fearless learning. If the result is different than expected, leaders should see it as an opportunity for growth for their team.

They also know mistakes may be made, even with the best-laid plans, and should create contingency plans that allow team leaders to react and recover quickly when they see them go awry. They need to plan for the best and yet be prepared for the worst because the world, especially the business world, is constantly changing. Flexibility and willingness to find new ways to move forward is imperative.

Finally, the book reminds its readers to be genuinely empathetic. While many leaders say that people come first, implementing this principle can be challenging. It takes courage and skill. Learning to instill empathy in their organizations and discover what is essential to their employees is essential. This goes beyond perks such as gym memberships or on-site childcare. They must do whatever is within reason to get to know their employees, their needs, and their quirks.

The authors share a story of one CEO who gathered their top executive team to create a set of leadership principles that would allow them to create more dignity in their workplace. Their list included, "I inspire passion, optimism, and purpose" and "My personal communication cultivates fulfilling relationships." This list allowed them to share their organization guidelines and ask others to hold them accountable to them. When they find ways to invest in and engage with their organizations and show them how much they care, leaders will soon discover that there will be nothing they won't strive to achieve.

The Journey of Leadership: How CEOs Learn to Lead from the Inside Out, McKinsey & Company Senior Partners Dana Maor, Hans-Werner Kaas, Kurt Strovink, and Ramesh

Srinivash is an enjoyable, engaging read. It invites their readers to think deeply about what they have read and ways to apply it to their work. The end of each chapter offers a list of questions and a summary for easy reference as the reader moves forward on their leadership journey. They have worked to expound on each idea shared by using shared stories from those they have come in contact with over the years. Finally, they close by emphasizing the element that runs through each stage of learning - reinvention and learning. They are working to challenge themselves and the organization but refuse to fall victim to the frenzy of being a CEO. Instead, they understand that the journey of being a leader never ends, and they purpose to reflect on their journey and work to be the best version of themselves.

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