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TouchPoints

Creating Powerful Leadership Connections in the Smallest of Moments

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Leadership is tough. You must hit your marks — despite back-to-back meetings, endless e-mails and chance encounters in the hallway.

Most leaders feel that these inevitable demands keep them from doing their “real work.” But in *Touchpoints*, authors Douglas Conant and Mette Norgaard argue that these interactions are overlooked opportunities to expand your influence and deliver measurably better results.

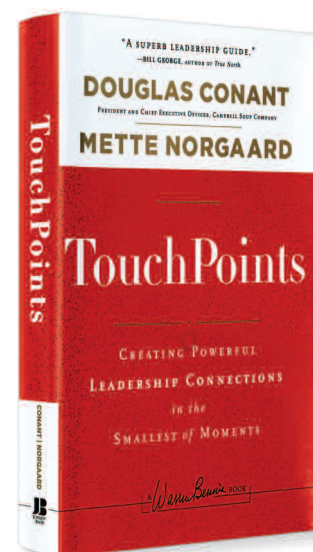
TouchPoints shows how a leader’s legacy and impact are, in fact, built through hundreds, even thousands, of interactive moments in time.

The good news is that everyone can attain greater “TouchPoint” mastery by delving into three essential assets: your head, heart and hands. As the authors explain, one of the greatest investments you can make is constant attention to your mental model, your emotional maturity and your bias for action.

TouchPoints speaks to the theory and craft of leadership by promoting a rational, authentic, active and wise approach. With greater skill and energy, you can start transforming otherwise ordinary interactions into powerful leadership moments — one TouchPoint at a time.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- The three essentials of mastery.
- How to create your own unique leadership prototype.
- Why “walking the talk” is essential to your success as a leader.
- How to listen exponentially.
- The four magic words of any TouchPoint.



by Douglas Conant
and Mette Norgaard

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: TOUCHPOINTS

by Douglas Conant and Mette Norgaard

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The Power of TouchPoints

It's 3:30 p.m. You're holed up in your office, trying to grab some time to finish a proposal that's critical to the future of your department — and your own career — when a team member knocks on your door to ask for advice. How do you respond? Do you give in to the flash of irritation and tell him to come back later? Or do you stop what you are doing and help him right now? It's your choice.

As a leader, you make these choices all day, every day. The “knock on the door” happens over and over again — phone calls, meetings, e-mails and text messages, all with questions to answer and fires to put out. The workload is expanding and the time you have to deal with each issue is shrinking. Some days it feels as if the information age has morphed into the interruption age.

But what if you could step back and look at these interactions with a fresh perspective? What if, instead of seeing them as interfering with your work, you were to look at them as latent leadership moments? What if these moments held the answer to leadership in today's busy world, turning ordinary moments into TouchPoints?

TouchPoints take place any time two or more people get together to deal with an issue and get something done. TouchPoints can be planned or spontaneous — in hallways, on factory floors, in conference rooms, on the phone and via e-mail. Some deal with straightforward issues; others involve complex challenges.

These TouchPoints *are* the real work. They are the moments to bring your strategies and priorities to life, the interactions that translate your ideas into new and better behaviors.

The Exponential Effect of a TouchPoint

TouchPoint leadership capitalizes on the social networking effect, what we call the *exponential effect*.

Every person you engage with is embedded in webs of relationships. Whatever you say or do in a TouchPoint may be quickly transmitted to five or six people in that person's network — and then relayed to their colleagues and so on. Therefore, when you impart a sense of urgency, people may pass that on; when you inspire confidence, that too may be transmitted; and when you blow it, people are bound to hear about it.

You can choose to bring a sense of positive energy and direction to your very next TouchPoint, and then do it again. To get started right away, simply take the next unplanned interaction as an opportunity to help. Twenty TouchPoints a week would add up to more than 1,000 TouchPoints in a year. This would be a very small commitment, yet the impact would be significant because you would not only feel more in control of your time, but you would also gain more influence. ●

The Commitment to Mastery

To succeed in the work of leadership, you need to be good at it. And to become really good at it, you have to prepare. Frankly, if you don't love the pressure, the sweat and the grind, it just isn't worth it. Life is too short to be halfhearted about your work. More important, people deserve someone worth following. That is why we encourage you to make the commitment to mastery.



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The Mastery Essentials

If you aspire to mastery, you must use your head, heart and hands. You need a *logical* model that guides your approach to leading people and change (head), a clear sense of purpose and an *authentic* way of engaging with others (heart), and practices that enable you to be prepared and *competent* in the moment (hands).

Your touch is where the three strands (head, heart and hands) come together in the art of the moment, enabling you to make clear judgments in the TouchPoint. When you have the touch, you can have a dozen balls in the air and juggle them all with ease. You may stand in the midst of escalating tensions and naturally diffuse them. You can make split-second decisions in a way that seems effortless to others. The way you do that is by blocking out noise, stripping away everything extraneous and being fully present to the possibilities of the moment.

1. Use Your Head: To begin with, you need a clear approach to leadership. As a leader, you must be prepared to parse through countless data points, detect the patterns and frame what is going on in the TouchPoint. To do so quickly, intelligently and consistently, you need to create a personal leadership model that works for you in your unique situation.

2. Use Your Heart: Next, you need to become incredibly clear about your intentions so that you can develop a healthy and dynamic core. Think about the core of a golfer, the axis around which the rest of the body rotates when he or she takes a swing. Having a strong core allows the golfer to wind up the body's inherent energy and release it in a natural and controlled way until the rotation is completed. To achieve such grace and power in the moment, you need to be very clear about who you are and why you choose to lead. You need to have the heart for leadership.

3. Use Your Hands: Finally, you need to become clearly competent so that you can engage with confidence and extend that confidence to others. You need to be able to draw on a variety of skills so that regardless of what is thrown at you, you can handle it. You may need to diffuse tension with humor, push people by asking tough questions or tell stories that stick. Whatever is needed, you want to do it skillfully.

Missing the Mark

If you like the *idea* of mastery but wonder whether it is worth the price, take a moment to consider the costs of not aiming for mastery.

- *If your head is not in the game:* When you don't have a

clear approach to leadership, people don't understand why you make the calls you do. Why was that project given to another department? Why don't they get that report anymore? People search for the underlying logic, but it doesn't seem to be there.

- *If your heart is not in the game:* When you don't know (or don't show) what's in your heart, you cannot make a real connection with others. You may genuinely care about the people on your team, but if they can't tell your true feelings, why should they trust you? Also, if you don't convey what you care about, they will be less forthcoming with their own concerns and cares.

- *If you are not prepared for the game:* When you don't do your homework, people don't count on you to prepare and put forth your best effort. They just don't feel they're in good hands with you as a leader.

Leaders who want to be influential look at leadership as something they must get really good at. Because they work at it, they improve, which makes them feel more committed, so they practice more and continue to accelerate their own development. What type of leader do you want to be? And do you want it enough to make the commitment to mastery? ●

Use Your Head: The Commitment to Inquiry

Developing a leadership model is one of the most practical, energy-saving, and stress-reducing things you can do as a leader. To lead effectively in a TouchPoint, you need a leadership model that is uniquely relevant to your situation, one that can engage people and improve performance. Every leader's model is different, because everyone's situation is different.

Make a Commitment to Inquiry

The first step in creating your own leadership model is to become aware of your current assumptions — the ways in which you almost instinctively think about people and performance. Next, search for answers to two vital leadership questions by drawing inspiration from various sources and thinking about your own experience. Finally, organize your answers into a meaningful flow — an *ideapod* where you have “downloaded” the best thinking available, added your own experience and created a set of ideas that works for you.

Consider Your Underlying Assumptions

You first need to surface your assumptions about leadership. As you read the examples below, which ones fit your way of thinking about leadership most closely?

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- *Competition* or *collaboration*
- *Instructing* others or *inviting* them
- *Expanding* rapidly or *evolving* gradually
- Aiming for *efficiency* or creating *communities*

You can think of the word pairs as representing two distinct world views, two different ways to think about motivation and change. When you gravitate toward stories that build on the first word in the pair, you will tend toward an *assertive* way of thinking about issues and people. If you are inclined toward the second word in the pairs, you will have an *adaptive* approach.

But why limit yourself to one approach or another? Instead of having an assertive or adaptive approach, leaders need an *integrated* approach. It makes no sense to think of people as being altruistic *or* selfish, competitive *or* collaborative because, as human beings, we are both. Likewise, it is nonsense to look at an organization as if it ought to run like a machine *or* evolve like a living system. There are ways to create both efficiencies *and* communities. In fact, the best solutions often lie in the creative tension between these natural dualities.

Answer Two Vital Questions

Just as a potter must know his material (clay) and understand how to transform it (process) into a strong functional object, a leader must know his or her “material” (people’s talent, energy, creativity and commitment) and understand how to transform that into performance.

To comprehend these basics and how they apply in your culture and context, you need to ask two vital questions:

- *What makes people give the very best of themselves?* This question is about what makes your people engage wholeheartedly. Consider each member of your team. What do you think engages each person? What turns each person off? What about the team as a whole?
- *What makes for ever stronger performance in an ever changing world?* What are the lessons you have learned about achieving results and then doing it again and again? Have you ever been part of a team that came from behind, beat all the odds and won? If so, what created the magic? Also consider your best-performing colleagues and bosses. How did they approach major initiatives? What did they do to create momentum and deliver results?

Move From Prototype to Primetime

The value of prototyping is that it allows you to take your best ideas and make them tangible. The aim is to develop a model that you can draw on the back of a

napkin while explaining your leadership approach to someone else. (For valuable examples of leadership prototypes, please visit www.conantleadership.com)

To start developing your prototype, reflect on the assertive, adaptable and integrative points of view and the way you responded to the two vital questions. Jot down your insights.

Sort your thoughts and ideas into clusters. Some might deal with relationships while others focus on results; some might concern people’s character and others, their competencies. Play around until the clusters seem clear.

Next, step back and think about how the ideas relate to one another. When you have a good understanding of how your ideas are connected, quickly draw several rough prototypes until you have something that makes sense. Once you have come up with a prototype that you think accurately expresses your own unique approach to leadership, see whether you can explain it to someone else. If things are not flowing well at this stage, go back and create a few more prototypes. Once you are confident that your model is clear and coherent, you will be ready for prime time: to share it with your team, your boss and other people you work with.

Be Consistent and Flexible

Once you have a solid model, you need to execute it consistently. Using your head means you become disciplined in both your thinking and implementation. But there are, of course, times when you need to make adjustments to your model as you gain an even better understanding of human nature and the nature of change. Another reason to adjust your model is perhaps because you need better and faster ways to engage people and accelerate the pace of change.

Einstein once observed that the person who “can no longer wonder, no longer feel amazement, is as good as dead.” To be fully alive in the way you lead, you need to be curious, ask good questions, and find an approach that works for you in your unique culture and context. In other words, make a commitment to inquiry. ●

Use Your Heart: The Commitment to Reflection

When you use your heart, you will make better judgments concerning *the issue*; you will make stronger connections with *other people*; and you will develop your personal authority *as a leader*.

Lead With Your Head and Your Heart

Some of the decisions you need to make in a

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TouchPoint are clear-cut. You simply get the best data available, do the analysis and make the call. In most cases, though, you need to consider more than numbers. There are even times when the numbers reveal one course of action to be the *smart* thing to do, yet you know it is not the *right* thing to do. In such cases, you need to trust your intuition and connection to your principles. You need to use both your head and your heart to make a wise decision.

Even when making minor decisions, you will want to use your heart. For example, you may need to decide whether to start an off-site meeting on a Monday or Tuesday, a decision that determines whether people get to spend Sunday at home instead of at an airport. Each day, dozens of such minor decisions affect the trust people have in their leader, the pride they take in working for the team and the strength of their commitment.

To make genuine connections with other people, you need to bring more than information and experience to the interaction — you need to bring yourself.

Answer the Questions of the Heart

Previously, you considered two questions that encouraged you to look at the way the *world* works. Now reflect on the way *you* work through three questions of the heart:

1. Why do I choose to lead? All too often, people become leaders because doing so was the next logical step in their careers. They know what they want to *get* from their position (such as a new challenge, more influence, more prestige or better pay), but many are vague about what they want to *give*. Many have a good reason to lead, but are tentative about their *purpose*. (For resources on leading with purpose visit www.mettenorgaard.com.)

Knowing *why* you want to lead gives you a well of energy to draw on that is deeper than merely finding meaning in your work. The challenge is that most of us don't take the time to connect with our passion and purpose.

2. What is my code? Every leader needs a code to live by, a set of principles that provides an underlying consistency in every TouchPoint. Your code is based on the principles you believe in and captures what to you is the right thing to do. When you live by your code, you have a good conscience; when you violate it, you disappoint yourself.

Through personal reflection, you can start to capture the principles you choose to live by. Think of a time when you took a stand. Why did you do it? What principles were involved? How did it make you feel? What

about a time when you didn't take a stand but felt that you should have? What principles were you ignoring? What were the consequences?

Having a code helps you keep your perspective when you are doing well and take the high ground in times of adversity.

3. How well do I walk the talk? Each TouchPoint is a small test: You say you want people to be candid, but do you really want to hear what they have to say? You say you want to let them run with the ball, but do you really let them? When you “walk the talk,” people find you more credible. As a leader, your goal is to walk the talk in TouchPoint after TouchPoint.

How well do you walk the talk? Be honest with yourself and keep in mind that it's common for people to think they are doing better than they actually are. Let's say your code includes “honesty” and “respect,” and you see yourself as someone who talks straight and pays attention when others talk. OK, that is what you *say* is important, but is it what other people see you *do*?

The easiest way to keep yourself honest is to become clear-eyed about how you use your time. How tenacious are you about making time for things that matter most? A more data-driven way is to get unfiltered 360-degree feedback on your behavior. Yet another way is to find a couple of trusted advisors who care about your success and will be candid with you.

Beyond the three questions of the heart, leaders often struggle with a fourth question, which is about accountability. *First and foremost, you are accountable to yourself.* To be true to yourself, continue the process of self-discovery by answering the questions: “Why do I choose to lead?” and “What is my code?” at even deeper levels. To reinforce the insights you gain, start each day with something that inspires you. During the day, try to spend time with people who bring out the best in you. And end the day by asking yourself: *How well did I walk the talk today? What could I have done better?* ●

Use Your Hands: The Commitment to Practice

TouchPoints are intensely practical because each one deals with real people and real issues in real time. Therefore, it is not enough to be clear-headed and clear-hearted in a TouchPoint; you must also be clearly competent.

Developing the skills so that you can be proficient in TouchPoint after TouchPoint requires continuous practice. TouchPoints are all about communication. To han-

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de whatever might be thrown at you in the moment, you need to be incredibly skilled at understanding what others are saying and at making yourself understood.

Lead With Listening

Listening is one of the most amazingly efficient things you can do as a leader. But listening can be very hard to do. One reason is that most leaders have a bias for action and when they are listening, it does not feel as though they are doing anything. And listening is even more difficult in today's interruption age.

In a TouchPoint, listening with your head and with your heart is critical if you are to gain a good understanding of the issue. Without that understanding, you can easily waste everyone's time by solving the wrong problem or by merely addressing a symptom, not the underlying disease.

To use people's time and energy wisely, you want to listen with your head for the evidence, listen with your heart for the energy and listen exponentially for all the other voices that touch the issue.

Listen With Your Head

Listening with your head means listening for the evidence — facts, figures, actions, events and conversations — that led to that current TouchPoint.

Most TouchPoints deal with quick updates and straightforward tactical issues; in those interactions, you can simply get the information, find out what the other person needs and provide it. But when the issue is more complex, you need to give the other people more time to describe the situation. To make sure you stay with them on their agenda instead of hijacking it, here is a small practice to try. Whenever someone is seeking to explain something to you and you feel a question or piece of advice bubbling up, bite your tongue and ask yourself, *How exactly will this comment be helpful to the others?*

Listen With Your Heart

When you listen with your heart for the energy in a TouchPoint, you tune in to how the other people are feeling. This means you pay attention not only to the words, but also to the facial expressions, tone of voice and body language that reveal whether people feel excited, nervous, upset, unsure, committed or confident. An easy practice that can help you tune in to the feelings of a TouchPoint is to imagine the energy as being red, yellow or green. It's like coming to a traffic light: you stop if it's red, slow down if it's yellow or go through if it's green.

- **When the energy is red:** We say the energy in a TouchPoint is red when people are testy or angry,

when they become vocal about why your proposal won't work, or when they withdraw, avoid eye contact and shut down. If you sense that this is taking place, stop and listen. Try to find out what is going on. If they are disagreeing with you, try to understand their reasoning.

- **When the energy is yellow:** In a TouchPoint, people may seem to express doubt, keep questioning something, or seem hesitant or unsure about how to handle the situation. When that happens, slow down and listen with your heart. Giving people a chance to express their concerns can help both of you.
- **When the energy is green:** Green energy means that the way is open for you and others to move on; the other people in the TouchPoint feel curious, engaged, confident and keen to move forward. Green energy doesn't mean you stop listening. In fact, the more engaged the other people are, the more you might want to tune in, because they will probably be eager to offer good ideas and take on the responsibility for implementing them.

Listen Exponentially

Just as every TouchPoint you engage in can potentially impact many people beyond those who are immediately involved, every conversation you have with an individual or group has been triggered by many prior TouchPoints. To gain an accurate and complete understanding of what is really going on, you need to think about all the stakeholders and listen for all the voices that touch the issue, even those that are not present. That kind of listening demands extraordinary attention.

Here is a solid practice you can use to get the full picture. When people schedule time to meet with you about an important issue, ask them to come prepared with the answers to a few diagnostic questions, such as: What is the problem? Whom does this problem affect and how? What are the behaviors that are contributing to the problem? and so forth. Then begin the meeting by giving them 8 to 10 minutes to lay out their answers without interruption.

Follow Through With Speaking

In a TouchPoint, you want to speak from your heart so that people become engaged and you need to speak from the head so that what you say makes sense to them. Furthermore, you need to speak skillfully and exponentially so that your message will be clearly understood through several degrees of separation.

Speak From Your Head

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One of the most important things to do in a TouchPoint is to clarify expectations. When a leader is not sufficiently clear, people fill in the gaps themselves. They decide what a “quality outcome” looks like, make assumptions about what “within a reasonable time” means, or figure out when and how to hold themselves accountable. If their assumptions are wrong, as assumptions often are, people may not meet your expectations, which may result in feelings of disappointment and frustration, wasted time, loss of confidence and, sometimes, higher costs.

Speak From Your Heart

When you need to engage people on your issue, you need to make a strong personal connection. The more you are asking of them, the stronger that connection needs to be.

When leading major change initiatives, one of the greatest challenges is to get people excited and committed to the change. To do so, you need to speak from your heart and share your enthusiasm for the project.

Here’s a practice you can try with the help of a colleague and a copy of a classic speech, like the Gettysburg Address. Read your speech to your colleague. Every time your colleague is moved, he or she is going to move toward you. When your colleague isn’t moved, he or she is going to move away from you. Practice reading the speech until the person ends up standing right next to you.

Speak Exponentially

In this interruption age, we engage in smaller and smaller TouchPoints, and in many more of them. Those brief interactions also travel faster and farther than ever before: a quick text message to a colleague in another building can make it around the world in seconds. Consequentially, it has become imperative for leaders to master the power of exponential communication, both face-to-face and in writing.

One executive does this by writing 10 to 20 personal notes every day to thank people for their contributions, welcome new hires, or congratulate leaders on promotions or other successes. He writes the notes to individuals who often share them with other people. Over the years, these notes have added up to tens of thousands of TouchPoints.

Lift Your Game

The more difficult a TouchPoint and the higher the risk, the more skilled you need to be. For people to count on you in highly visible and highly sensitive situa-

tions, they need to trust both your intentions and your skills. To reach that level of competency requires intense practice.

Performers who are world-class in their fields practice intensely for about three hours a day to stay on top of their game. That is probably not realistic for you. But it is realistic to select one skill that you will practice during the coming week. For example, you might ration the number of times you allow yourself to speak during a meeting. As you practice, focus on how good you are compared to how good you *could become*.

Wynton Marsalis, director of the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, considers pristine technique to be a sign of morality. Not mastering the technique is, to him, like an athlete who comes to a game out of shape. “Don’t start professing a love for the game. The love is what would have made you get your ass in shape.” To Marsalis, love is the spiritual essence of what we do. Technique is the way we tangibly demonstrate it.

Whether you are a leading artist or a world-class leader, real learning requires both *passion* and *practice*. Yes, it is hard; it is also intensely rewarding. ●

Mastering the Touch: How Can I Help?

Every leader has his or her own unique style. But when it comes to mastering the touch, they all have one thing in common. When dealing with others, they think less about what they can *get* and more about what they can *give*.

Four Magic Words: How Can I Help

Leadership is not about *you* — it’s about *them*. Whether the TouchPoint is about your issue, their issue or an issue you share, asking “How can I help?” at the start of an interaction opens up space for people to voice their ideas, concerns and viewpoints. Those four magic words shift the focus from what you want to communicate or accomplish to finding out what they want and need from you.

The Touch Point Triad

In music, a triad describes the three notes you need to form a complete chord, the three notes that create the harmony. Likewise, a TouchPoint triad describes the key notes you have to hit to be helpful in even the briefest of moments. Asking the magic question “How can I help?” prepares you for the triad.

The first note, listening intently, helps you figure out what is really going on and what others need.

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The second note, framing the issue, ensures that everyone in the TouchPoint has the same understanding of the situation.

The third note, advancing the agenda, means deciding what next steps to take and who will take them. After the TouchPoint is over, following up with a question such as “How did it go?” or “Is there anything else you need from me?” is a reminder that you care. In addition, the other people’s response lets you know how things worked out and whether you were genuinely helpful.

As you engage in a TouchPoint, all you need to remember is “listen–frame–advance,” “listen–frame–advance.” And you do it dozens of times each day, day after day.

The Four A’s of an Effective TouchPoint

Having the touch is really about connecting, being present to the possibilities, advancing the agenda and improving performance. It is about engaging in a way that is alert, abundant, authentic and adaptable.

- **Alert.** Being alert is about developing great situation sensing. As a leader, you can be so alert that you become superb at identifying the real issue. When you are fully present, you can see gaps in someone’s line of logic and pick up bits of information that provide clues as to what is going on.
- **Abundant.** To think in a way that is abundant, you need to reject the scarcity mind-set that says, “I can either hit the targets this quarter *or* build the capacity to deliver long term,” and instead find ways to “get the job done now *and* next time.” Instead of thinking “I can either be tough-minded *or* tender-hearted,” you can be “tough on standards *and* enthusiastic about people.”
- **Authentic.** Being authentic means that leading is not just your job; it’s your passion. If it is something you love to do, you will spend a lot of time thinking about it and becoming really good at it, which will make you enjoy it even more. As you share your enthusiasm for leadership with others, they will *want* to join you. In addition, being authentic also comes with a certain level of authority, because it means you will live by a very clear code that provides an underlying clarity and consistency in every TouchPoint.
- **Adaptable.** The secret to being adaptable is to develop a broad range of skills so that you can adjust and adapt in the moment. Does the situation require you to be directive (“Do as I say”), consultative (“What do you think?”) or inspiring (“We are

changing the world.”)? Do you need to push people or be patient? Show strength or share a vulnerability? Step forward and take charge or fall back so that someone else can take the lead? Whatever you do, the key is to do it skillfully.

How Can I Do Better Tomorrow?

You know what it feels like when you have touched someone in a positive way. Conversely, you also know what it feels like when you blow it. When you do mess up — and you will — the key is to course-correct and to do it quickly. People will forgive you for messing up, as long as they can see you are doing your best to improve.

If you really want to make progress, do your own “post-game analysis” of your TouchPoints at the end of each day. Reflect on the dozens of connections you have made and ask, *What worked? What could I have done better?* This is not only about getting experience, but, more important, learning from your experience.

The ongoing discipline of inquiry, reflection and practice will help you become an ever better leader. And there will always be more to learn. ●

Coda

Leadership is hard. The pressures are mounting, the complexities are escalating, the demands are never-ending and even if you were to work 24/7, you could never get everything done. That is just the way it is.

Yet no matter how hard it can be to achieve ever higher levels of performance, we believe you can approach each day with a sense of optimism and focus your energy on the things you can control. When you are clear-headed and clear-hearted, you can consistently direct your attention to *the issues* that are material to the business, a matter of principle or both. When you are clearly competent, you can engage *the other people* in a way that increases their commitment and confidence. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *TouchPoints*, you’ll also like:

1. ***Talent Is Overrated* by Geoff Colvin.** Colvin takes a look at what really makes world class performers great, revealing that it is more involved than just talent.
2. ***What’s Holding You Back* by Robert Herbold.** Herbold explores why managers hesitate to confront issues and reveals the core principles of confident leadership.
3. ***The Truth About Leadership* by Barry Z. Posner and James Kouzes.** Leadership experts Kouzes and Posner share 10 time-tested truths about leadership.