Praise for 10 Virtues of Outstanding Leaders

“10 Virtues of Outstanding Leaders is an extraordinarily insightful, compelling, and timely discussion of the very foundation of leadership – the character of leaders. Al Gini and Ronald Green powerfully and persuasively make the case that it’s imperative for leaders to be attuned to their ethical responsibility to others. And they are right. All the programs to develop leaders, all the courses and classes, all the books and tapes, all the blogs and websites offering tips and techniques are meaningless unless the people who are supposed to follow believe in the person who’s supposed to lead. In an era in which it often seems that anything goes, it’s vital that every leader and every leadership educator take Gini’s and Green’s message to heart. It’s vital not only for their personal success, it’s vital for the long-term viability of our society. 10 Virtues of Outstanding Leaders is a must-read, and I urge you to get started immediately.”

—Jim Kouzes, coauthor of the bestselling The Leadership Challenge and Dean’s Executive Fellow of Leadership, Leavey School of Business, Santa Clara University

“10 Virtues of Outstanding Leaders is a thoughtful and thorough exploration of that knottiest of all leadership questions – what constitutes ‘good’ leadership? Gini and Green have been wrestling with related issues for years, and it shows. The book is a valuable contribution to the never-ending discussion of what it takes to lead wisely and well.”

—Barbara Kellerman, Harvard Kennedy School, and author and editor of many books on leadership and followership including, most recently, The End of Leadership and Leadership: Essential Selections on Power, Authority, and Influence

“Few leadership books mine the field of philosophy for its practical knowledge. Few use the treasury of insights available in the writings of philosophers that speak to issues of character and ethics, ones that are critical for successful leadership. Fewer still apply those insights to living examples of leadership: Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, and Steve Jobs. In their new book, 10 Virtues of Outstanding Leaders, the philosophers Gini and Green do all this, and more.”

—Thomas Donaldson, Mark O. Winkelman Professor, The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, Director of the Zicklin Center for Business Ethics Research, and coauthor of Ties that Bind: A Social Contracts Approach to Business Ethics
Foundations of Business Ethics  
Series editors: W. Michael Hoffman and Robert E. Frederick

Written by an assembly of the most distinguished figures in business ethics, the Foundations of Business Ethics series aims to explain and assess the fundamental issues that motivate interest in each of the main subjects of contemporary research. In addition to a general introduction to business ethics, individual volumes cover key ethical issues in management, marketing, finance, accounting, and computing. The books, which are complementary yet complete in themselves, allow instructors maximum flexibility in the design and presentation of course materials without sacrificing either depth of coverage or the discipline-based focus of many business courses. The volumes can be used separately or in combination with anthologies and case studies, depending on the needs and interests of the instructors and students.

1  John R. Boatright, *Ethics in Finance*, second edition
2  Ronald Duska, Brenda Shay Duska, and Julie Ragatz, *Accounting Ethics*, second edition
3  Richard T. De George, *The Ethics of Information Technology and Business*
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5  Norman E. Bowie with Patricia H. Werhane, *Management Ethics*
6  Lisa H. Newton, *Business Ethics and the Natural Environment*
7  Kenneth E. Goodpaster, *Conscience and Corporate Culture*
8  George G. Brenkert, *Marketing Ethics*
9  Al Gini and Ronald M. Green,  
   10 *Virtues of Outstanding Leaders: Leadership and Character*

Forthcoming

Denis Arnold, *Ethics of Global Business*
10 Virtues of Outstanding Leaders

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    Mary Jean Green
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Ronald M. Green is Eunice & Julian Cohen Professor for the Study of Ethics and Human Values at Dartmouth College, USA. He served as the director of Dartmouth’s Ethics Institute from 1992 until 2011. Professor Green is actively involved in numerous fields of applied ethics, particularly bioethics and business ethics, and is a consultant to a number of leading corporations including Ogilvy & Mather. A former director of the National Institutes of Health’s National Human Genome Research Institute, Professor Green has also been a member of the NIH’s Human Embryo Research Panel. He was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2005. Professor Green’s many publications include *The Ethical Manager* (1993) and *Babies by Design* (2007).
We need heroes (leaders), people who can inspire us, help shape us morally, spur us on to purposeful action . . .

Robert Coles¹

As a species we are fascinated and often preoccupied by the concept of leadership and the conduct of individual leaders. But, while leaders enthrall us, we are uneasy in regard to our relationship to them. We alternately love them, hate them, like them, loathe them, desire them, despise them, seek them out, and shun them. Yet, despite our confusion, our desire for leaders is unending. Like in the pursuit of the Holy Grail, we are ineluctably drawn to them. We are constantly in search of the latest candidate for fame, the newest model off the assembly line, the next great hope.

Anthropologist Joseph Campbell argues that all cultures, all societies, and, by extension, all organizations (political or otherwise) are engaged in a “hero quest.” All cultures search for a unique, larger-than-life, gifted person or for a singular idea, belief, or iconic symbol that helps to organize, explain, and give meaning, purpose, and direction to life. Campbell believes that the “hero quest” is in effect a “leadership quest.” The hero, like the leader, imposes order, offers a moral compass, and defines and directs the geography of life for everyone. For Campbell, leadership and the quest for a leader are anthropological constants, necessary conditions for collective/communal existence.² According to Barbara Kellerman of the Center for Public Leadership at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government, putting aside the notion of type (democratic or despotic) and effectiveness (successful or unsuccessful) of a particular leader, our collective fascination with and pursuit of a champion on a white horse are part of who we are.³ We want, need, and seek out leadership.

The last twenty years have seen the emergence of new, empirically based studies of leadership that make a powerful contribution to our understanding
of the role that ethics plays in organizational life. These studies seek to document the relationship between “stated ethical values,” “specific leader conduct and behavior,” the “specific leader-level outcomes” of that behavior, and its “long and short term impact” on leaders and followers alike.4 Perhaps the most influential and highly acclaimed example of this genre is James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner’s bestseller *The Leadership Challenge* (over 1.8 million copies sold). The authors are committed to the proposition that leadership is not primarily about personality but about specific kinds of behavior.5 Although each leader is a unique individual, Kouzes and Posner are convinced that there are shared patterns to the practice of leadership and that these practices can be learned.6 Since 1983, the authors have conducted a series of surveys with over seventy-five thousand business and government workers and executives and asked them: “What specific values, personal traits, or characteristics do you look for and admire in a leader?” and “What do you most look for and admire in a leader, someone whose direction you would willingly follow?”7

The authors claim that the results of these surveys have been constant over time and consistent across countries, cultures, ethnicities, industries, and organizations, as well as across gender, education, and age groups. The vast majority of the individuals surveyed believe that, to create a following, the leader must be honest, forward-looking, inspiring, and competent.5 The essence of their argument is straightforward and quantitatively supported. In all forms of organized life, in order for leaders to get extraordinary things done, they “must act,” and they “ought to act” in an “exemplary” way, which in turn elicits and inspires “exemplary” behavior from those whom they lead.

Kouzes and Posner’s studies show that much can be learned from continuing empirical research in leadership studies. But we believe that more needs to be done philosophically as well. It is not enough to identify the values that people say they admire. It is also crucial to understand the moral basis of these values and the role that particular moral excellences (virtues) play in organizational life. This is the traditional task of philosophy. Thus students of leadership need to meditate on Socrates as well as on statistics. Quantitative work on leadership need a kind of guidance and interpretation that is informed by a philosophical analysis of human values.

This book is a means as a contribution to the literature on leadership. We come to the issue not from the perspective of social science, management, political theory, or organizational development. We are students of philosophy, and our primary area of interest is ethics. We are convinced that leadership is an ethical enterprise. We believe that leadership is a duty, an obligation, and a service to others. We believe that the ethics of leaders establishes the ethics, vision, and mission of those being led. We believe that leadership must also focus on the character of those who are being led and
on others whom they affect. We agree with former CEO and author Max DePree: “The signs of outstanding leadership appear primarily among the followers. Are the followers reaching their potential?”

Drawing on the research and writing of thinkers like James MacGregor Burns, Joseph Rost, Warren Bennis, Peter Drucker, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and many others, we believe that the central working theses of this text can be expressed in the following manner.

• Ethical leadership is character driven. Character is about integrity, duty, and a social sense of responsibility.
• Ethical leaders exercise leadership in the interest of the common good.
• Ethical leaders put followers’ needs before their own.
• Ethical leaders exemplify a set of moral virtues and related personal excellences.
• The greatest leaders are those whose lives display one or more of the key moral virtues.

In what follows we identify, ground, and illustrate in action what we believe are the chief virtues of leadership. While we recognize that there are many other excellences that can contribute to outstanding leadership, we offer 10 virtues that we feel are among the most important. These virtues are:

• deep honesty;
• moral courage;
• moral vision;
• compassion and care;
• fairness;
• intellectual excellence;
• creative thinking;
• aesthetic sensitivity;
• good timing;
• deep selflessness.

Leadership is one of the most written about topics, both in the professional literature (management studies, organizational development, political theory) and in the popular press in the twentieth century. According to Ralph Stogdill and Bernard Bass, there were more than 4,725 studies of leadership prior to 1981. Recently, a staggering and almost unbelievable statistic generated by Amazon.com suggests that since 1989 more than twenty thousand books have been published with the word “leadership” in the title. Why, then, are we offering yet another book on the topic?
We believe we have two things to help refocus the leadership debate. The first is our insistence that ethics, character, and virtue are essential to real leadership; we call leadership without ethics misleadership. Valuable qualities like intelligence, charisma, charm, or influence, though good in themselves, can undermine organizational vitality and survival if they are employed without a foundation in ethical integrity and concern for others. This does not mean that outstanding leaders flaunt their commitment to ethics. Nor is ethical leadership the same thing as being “nice.” Ethical leaders may sometimes have to exercise stern discipline and to subordinate some people’s interests to the common good. But such leaders always act on principle, not on expediency, and their goal is one of common benefit.

Our second contribution is a focus on exemplary leaders who model the virtues of leadership. Aristotle, a founding figure of the discipline of ethics, argued that one does not learn ethics merely by reading a treatise on moral principles. Virtue is learned by witnessing the deeds of others. If character is essential to leadership, the best way to learn leadership is to study character. For Aristotle, the paragons of virtue are “excellent” persons who consistently conduct themselves with dignity and honor.

Hence, this is a book about characters with character. After several chapters that ground the importance of ethics in business and present the key virtues of outstanding leaders, we turn to those leaders themselves. As Aristotle argued, we need examples, the testimony of others, to understand how to form ourselves as leaders. In what follows, chapter by chapter, we depict individuals who in real-life situations act out the virtues that marked them as great leaders. Learning virtues is very much a matter of habit and imitation. By holding up these paragons of virtue, we aim to provide a useful tool for enhancing excellence in organizations.

Notes to Prologue


Ibid., p. xiii.

Ibid., pp. 28–29.

Ibid.


PART I
CHARACTER LEADERSHIP
What is Leadership?

Twixt kings and tyrants there’s this difference known: 
kings seek their subjects’ good, tyrants their own.

Robert Herrick

We began by observing that leadership is a necessary requirement of life. 
French President and Second World War hero Charles de Gaulle once observed 
that human beings can no more survive without direction than they can 
without eating, drinking, or sleeping. Putting aside the fact that de Gaulle 
exemplified “the one great person theory” of leadership and that he was most 
probably talking about himself, his larger point is true.

Today we accord movie star status to many of our leaders. Some of them 
become cultural icons and cultural role models. For example, the president of 
the United States is, arguably, the most photographed person in the world. 
Barack Obama’s first inauguration was the most reported event of its time. 
Former President Bill Clinton is a celebrity. The media have tracked every turn 
in the life of business leaders like Bill Gates or Steve Jobs. Where once saints 
dominated our imagination and were looked to for guidance, political and 
business leaders now play that role.

Why is leadership such a fascinating topic? Why are we so enthralled by 
leadership and curious about the private and public lives of leaders? According 
to military historian John Keegan, we are intrigued, inspired, and intimidated 
by those who wear the “mask of command.” We are mesmerized both by the 
successful exploits and by the front-page failures of individual leaders. We love 
them, we hate them. We shun them, and yet we seek them out. Many of us

Al Gini and Ronald M. Green. 
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think that leadership is a magical amulet. If we can just get the right person, the right leader, in the right job, success will naturally and necessarily follow. Leadership seems crucial for personal and organization success.

But how do we define what seems to be a critical and necessary ingredient for success? Unfortunately, although many of us can recognize leaders and leadership, few can give these terms an exact definition. Even when we can describe the concepts denoted by the words we employ, we find ourselves unable to reduce that concept to a few words: we all agree that leadership is important, but we disagree in stating what it is. W. B. Gallie refers to these kinds of words as “essentially contested concepts” and argues that they are a regular part of our lives and vocabulary. The challenge is to go beyond points of disagreement and discover the ideas that are essential to all our understandings of the concept.

Above all, it is important to begin by noting what leadership is not. According to John Gardner, leadership should never be confused or directly equated with social status, power, position, rank, or title.

Even in large corporations and government agencies, the top-ranking person may simply be bureaucrat number one. We have all occasionally encountered top persons who couldn’t lead a squad of seven year olds to the ice cream counter.

Perhaps business ethicist Price Pritchett puts it even more exactly when he says: “Putting a man in charge and calling him a leader is like giving a man a Bible and calling him a preacher. Bestowing the title doesn’t bestow the talent.” The simple fact is, an appropriate label for any person giving orders, monitoring compliance, and administering performance-based rewards and punishments could be “supervisor” or “manager,” but not necessarily “leader.”

A Reflection

But if the term “leadership” does not apply to all people within organizations who exercise responsibility, nor does it mean that only the “top dog” of an organization exercises leadership. Leadership can (and should) arise at all levels of an organization when challenges must be faced and important tasks accomplished. A primary duty of all leaders is to inspire and empower each member of the organization to be a leader within his/her own area of responsibility. At the close of the Second World War, General Dwight Eisenhower put this well when he wrote in his war biography:
In the end, the success of D-Day wasn’t superior generalship or years of careful planning. Nor was it our superiority in numbers and supplies. Rather it was the initiative and leadership of countless individual GIs that won the battle for us. It was the courage of men who took charge of the situations they found themselves in and their private determination to prevail.  

In their influential book *The Leadership Challenge*, Kouzes and Posner argue that, while there are a multitude of leadership definitions, they all share a common focus or a central theme. Leadership, of every kind and at every level, is about offering others an “action guide,” a plan, a challenge, a goal, a purpose that they are willing to embrace and carry on. Leadership is about motivating and mobilizing people to get “something” done, be that extraordinary or otherwise. Leadership is a catalyst for action. Of course, whether that action is moral or immoral, good or bad, positive or negative has to be determined through normative analysis and debate. But the conclusion is the same: all forms of leadership are action-based and action-driven. Although we agree with Kouzes and Posner that leadership is essentially about deliberate and concerted effort and action, we would argue that leadership is also about the personality and character – the ethical substance – of a particular leader. We believe that ethics is what defines leadership.

Bernard Bass, leadership historian and scholar, has observed: “There are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept.” He is right. Having said this, the following definition encapsulates our most basic and shared convictions about leadership:

Leadership is a power-laden, value-based and ethically driven relationship between leaders and followers who share a common vision and accomplish real changes that reflect their mutual purpose and goals.

This definition has five basic components. Let’s look at them in the ascending order of their importance to the concept:

1. power-laden;
2. relationship between leaders and followers;
3. common vision;
4. accomplish real changes;
5. value-based and ethically driven.

*Power-laden* All forms of leadership make use of power. The term comes (indirectly) from the Latin adjective *potis* (“powerful, capable”) and verb *posse*