

Chapter 1



Introduction to the Eight Practices

In a few hundred years, when the history of our time will be written from a long-term perspective, it is likely that the most important event historians will see is not technology, not the Internet, not e-commerce.

It is an unprecedented change in the human condition. For the first time—literally—substantial and rapidly growing numbers of people have choices. For the first time, they will have to manage themselves.

And society is totally unprepared for it.

—Peter Drucker

Years ago, I was mesmerized by Mary Catherine Bateson's book, *Composing a Life* (1989). In the book, Bateson, an anthropologist who is the daughter of Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson, examines the lives of several accomplished women with interesting, multifaceted careers, and concludes their success was the result of the unifying thread of their varied experiences and their effective use of it.

Leading With Wisdom is intended to help leaders of all kinds do just that—use their life experiences for success. And “success” for a leader—whether it's of an organization, team, workgroup, community, or family—is to support others and inspire them to succeed.

This book offers those working in all types of organizations—and at all levels—the key concepts and applications for expanding how they use their leadership and life skills repertoire. The content is based on several unique factors including:

- concepts drawn from interviewing more than 100 leadership sages—thought leaders in the field
- themes distilled from reading books and articles recommended by the sages interviewed
- ideas and concepts collected from interviewing numerous senior leaders of award-winning organizations
- personal experiences with leadership from my career and life.

Eight Leadership Practices That Matter

With such a wide variety of leaders, I assumed that narrowing down key insights would be difficult, but that was not the case. After analyzing the data and other research, eight “sage-worthy” practices emerged that underpin leaders who connect with and inspire others to achieve high performance. Specifically, my research revealed the following characteristics (after which I named each chapter of the book). Leaders:

- know who they are
- don't let ego win
- connect with empathy and compassion
- admit mistakes fearlessly
- embrace community
- create healthy work environments
- live their legacy.

Who Should Read This Book?

The specific audience for this book includes anyone in a position of influence in organizations (profit and not-for-profit) or those who train these individuals, specifically frontline managers, departmental and divisional leaders, as well as upper management and CEO-level leaders. It offers these professionals a way to evaluate and even benchmark their current approach to leadership against the practices identified by some of the world's most successful leadership experts, gurus, and top organizational leaders and CEOs. This book invites readers to learn how these experts and leaders have tapped into their own work experiences and life lessons to truly discover what it means to be a connected, engaged, and successful leader.

As the late sage Peter Drucker intuitively pointed out: “We are in one of those great historical periods that occurs every 200 or 300 years when people don’t understand the world anymore, and the past is not sufficient to explain the future” (Cameron and Quinn, 1999, 1). But as the world changes, human relationships become even more important.

This is a lesson I learned on my journey and I incorporated it into my own personal life as well. In addition, I developed workshops and leadership courses at the undergraduate and graduate level based on the lessons learned in the process of writing this book. I have been on a quest to learn how to lead and to live from people with rich life experience.



Sage as Leader

As an investment counselor, my husband's role model and mentor from afar is Warren Buffett. One of our rituals is to attend the Berkshire Hathaway annual meeting in Omaha and I am always struck by the thousands of people who attend. Many of them come from around the world to be in the presence of Buffett and Charlie Munger, who is Buffett's partner and vice chairman of Berkshire Hathaway.

Buffett is often quoted as saying, "Learning how to live is much more important than learning how to make a living." Buffett carefully scrutinizes the people who hold leadership positions in every business he purchases. Berkshire's philosophy is that they are investing in the current management who get to continue running their business. His goal is to keep them and not to replace them. So he needs to know and understand the people well.

Buffett is also known for sharing his wisdom with several MBA classes every year. The students either travel to Omaha or he travels to the institution. He often starts off by saying, "I'm here to talk to you all about anything and everything you want, whether it is personal, political, or business in nature." One of his messages has to do with what he looks for in a manager or leader and he repeatedly says the same four things: passion, intelligence, energy, and integrity. And he says if they don't have integrity, he would prefer to have them "dumb and lazy because they will do less damage."

Even though Buffett is an investor, people want to probe his life experiences about all kinds of topics, such as education, happiness, fear, trust, retirement, love, relationships, and death. In fact, he discourages his top managers from retiring by telling them that Mrs. B. (Mrs. Blumkin, former CEO of Nebraska Furniture Mart) died one

year after she retired (at age 103). Buffet believes that you need to have a reason to get up in the morning, and why not continue doing something you love as long as you can do it?

Buffett and Munger are known for “cutting to the chase” and focusing on what is most important. For Buffett, what is essential has to do with living one’s best life. He realizes that leadership and business are based on quality relationships. It is hard to have quality relationships with people who lack integrity and with whom trust is not possible.

One story that made an impression on me had to do with friendships. Buffett knows a woman who survived a concentration camp, but she was slow to make friends because she wondered if they would “hide her.” So Buffet uses the “Would they hide me?” test in determining who is a real friend.

How to Get the Most From This Book

Leading With Wisdom describes how to integrate the eight key leadership practices into your life as a manager, other organizational leader, or learning professional. It backs up this promise with a practical application at the end of each chapter that details ways to integrate the concepts that have been discussed into everyday practice or training program planning. In addition, each chapter features several sidebar examples that illustrate the main points. The end of chapter section also provides specific techniques that help the reader further develop and continue the practice highlighted in the chapter.

“There You Are”

In ancient cultures, a group’s sages were those who had experienced rich lives, were thoughtful about what they had learned through these experiences, and willingly shared them with others. As Jon Kabat-Zinn so wonderfully outlines in *Wherever You Go There You Are* (2000), mountain climbing is a powerful metaphor for the “life quest, the spiritual journey, the path of growth, transformation, and understanding.” In mountain climbing, before moving up the mountain to the next encampment, you must replenish the camp being left for the people who will come after you; and when returning, go down the mountain a ways to share with the other climbers the knowledge gained from farther up the slope.

“As best we can, we show others what we have seen up to now. It’s at best a progress report, a map of our experiences, by no means the absolute truth. And so the adventure unfolds. We are all on Mount Analogue together. And we need each other’s help,” says Kabat-Zinn.

This book is my way of sharing what I have learned as I have climbed the “mountain.” I want to share the knowledge and wisdom gained so that others may benefit from my journey.

Chapter-by-Chapter Description

Each chapter concludes with Workshop and Personal Development Suggestions as examples of how to integrate the concepts into your life (or into a new or existing training or learning program). Reading suggestions are also included for further personal development.

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Eight Practices

The introduction outlines how the book is organized, who should read the book, and how to get the most from the book. The eight practices of connected, engaged, and successful leaders are briefly described along with the unique factors on which they are based.

Chapter 2: Leaders Know Who They Are

Knowing who you are involves more than recognizing strengths and weaknesses. This chapter offers some specific ways to discover what motivates and informs how and why you choose to lead others. Specific techniques are offered to help you discover these motivations. Also included are ways other leaders have taken this journey of self-discovery. Readers can take lessons from the experiences of these other leaders.

Chapter 3: Leaders Don't Let Ego Win

This chapter explores the origins of ego and argues for a healthy understanding and use of our ego. Without this understanding, the dark side of a leader's ego often emerges, creating a toxic environment. Learning to let go in order to move on is critical. Included are specific practices on keeping the ego in balance.

Chapter 4: Leaders Connect With Empathy and Compassion

Empathy and compassion are often considered soft skills, but the consistent practice of these skills is anything but soft. This chapter explains why it is essential for leaders to understand some basic concepts of loss, death, and grief in order to have empathy and compassion for life's many transitions—including loss of jobs, position, power, and purpose at work and at home.

Chapter 5: Leaders Admit Mistakes Fearlessly

Admitting mistakes fearlessly is a characteristic of effective leaders, and it includes self-forgiveness and the forgiveness of others. Admitting mistakes allows others to trust us. We trust others more easily as well. The winner in this trust dance is the organization and all those who work in a healthy, open environment.

Chapter 6: Leaders Embrace Community

Organizations are systems of interconnected parts, just as the communities in which we live. The best leaders are social architects working to build high-functioning organizations, but the work is not easy to finesse. This chapter discusses this community concept and how managers and other leaders can use this connection with community in their organization and in their own community where they live to become more effective managers and leaders.

Chapter 7: Leaders Model Resilience

Leaders need to model resilience and renewal in order to thrive through uncertainty and lead in chaos. This chapter outlines how a true sense of curiosity and creative thinking are essential for effectively modeling a resilient attitude and mindset.

Chapter 8: Leaders Create Healthy Work Environments

Leaders have an absolute obligation to create healthy work environments. This chapter includes specific examples of how award-winning organizations and their leaders built healthy, productive work environments and repaired toxic ones.

Chapter 9: Leaders Live Their Legacy

Leaders create their legacy every day and the epitaph is written daily with the decisions they make, how they make them, and the way those affected are treated along the way. This chapter discusses the concept of “living legacy” and the transformational potential of approaching leadership in this holistic way.

Chapter 10: Final Thoughts

This last chapter summarizes the main lessons that formed the framework for this book and includes some specific conviction and beliefs about the life of a leader.

What's Next?

Self-knowledge is the touchstone for every successful leader. The next chapter helps you develop a more reliable sense of yourself and what motivates and nurtures you. It also provides significant insight into seamlessly incorporating this self-knowledge into your work as a leader and daily challenges as a member of your family and community.