

FROM DREAMERS TO DOERS: THE LEADERSHIP LEAP

CHARISMA, CONVICTION, AND THE CRAFT OF
TURNING 'WHAT IF' INTO 'WHAT IS'

JOHN COUSINS



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to "From Dreamers to Doers: The Leadership Leap," your guide on the transformative journey from envisioning to executing greatness.

This book is a beacon for those who have ever been captivated by a vision so compelling that it feels like a call to action—a summon to bring what exists only in the imagination into the tangible world.

At the heart of every monumental achievement lies an idea, a spark. Yet, it's not the spark that ignites change; it's the deliberate, passionate pursuit to bring that idea to life.

At its core, leadership is the art of bridging the gap between the ethereal and the actual, between 'what if' and 'what is.' It's about inspiring others to see what you see, to believe what you believe, and to join you in the quest to make it real.

In these pages, you will discover that authentic leadership transcends mere management of tasks or people. It's about cultivating a charisma that resonates, influencing others not

through coercion but through conviction, and wielding the power of your vision to marshal the forces necessary to shape the future.

But how do you make the leap from dreamer to doer? How do you translate a vision into action, especially when the path is uncharted? This book offers not just theories but actionable insights and strategies, drawing from the wisdom of renowned leaders and the latest in leadership thought.

You'll learn how to develop your "court sense" in leadership, keeping your eye on the ball while absorbing the entire play-field—balancing the day-to-day with the big picture.

"From Dreamers to Doers: The Leadership Leap" is not just about leadership in the abstract. It's a practical manual for anyone ready to take their vision from the clouds to the ground, turning dreams into realities. Whether you're leading a startup, steering a team within a large corporation, or simply seeking to inspire those around you, this book is your roadmap.

Prepare to embark on a journey—a leap, if you will—from dreaming to doing, imagining to executing. It's time to turn your vision into your legacy. Let's begin.



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The moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision which no one could have dreamed would have come their way.

W. H. Murray

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CHAPTER 1

FROM MIND TO MATTER: LEADING WITH VISION AND ACTION

A true leader is a person who possesses excellent social influence and charisma and can enlist the aid and support of others to manifest a vision and accomplish a common task.

The genesis of all enterprises is an idea. Leadership is the art and craft of communicating that idea so compellingly that others want to help manifest it.

All projects begin as a vision through imagination. They are carried out with an attitude of great optimism, namely, the belief that what is merely an image in one's mind can be made concrete in the external world.

Leaders must first convince themselves and then get people to share their conviction that this vision is worth the effort.

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No doubt, the idea or the vision is crucial, but ultimately, it is the execution that separates simple dreams from concrete life-enhancing or life-changing products and services.

Leadership is based on inspiring the execution. Visions without action are hallucinations.

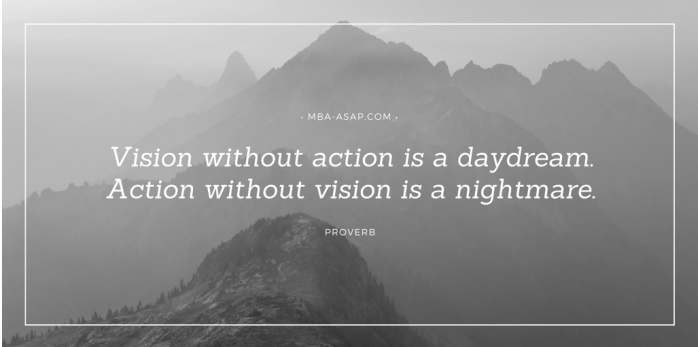
In *The Hollow Men*, T.S. Elliot said:

"Between the idea and the act lies the shadow."



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*Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow*
T.S. Eliot, *The Hollow Men*
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The term Executive means to execute.



CHAPTER 2

LEADERS ARE LIKE ATHLETES

Leaders, like athletes, are tasked with playing the game while observing it as a whole. Leaders need to develop "court sense."

Leaders have developed the art of keeping a sound perspective that allows them to be engaged in day-to-day tasks yet still see the big picture without getting lost in details. This context shifting takes focus on and devotion to the vision and a sense of the future.

Warren Bennis is an American scholar and author who is a pioneer in the field of Leadership studies. His research in the 1960s led him to foresee a change in organizational structure toward less hierarchical, more flat, and adaptive institutions.



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There are two ways of being creative. One can sing and dance. Or one can create an environment in which singers and dancers flourish.

Warren Bennis

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He anticipated this trend in both private and public institutions. He has written many books on the subject of leadership and is the go-to resource for more information on the subject.

Here are some examples of Bennis' wisdom on leadership:

- Create a compelling vision, one that takes people to a new place, and then translate that vision into a reality.
- Becoming a leader is synonymous with becoming yourself. It is precisely that simple, and it is also that difficult.
- People who cannot invent and reinvent themselves must be content with borrowed postures and secondhand ideas, fitting in instead of standing out.
- Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality.

An enterprise is formed and organized to carry out tasks.
Every enterprise needs a leader.

The leader, whose vision is simultaneously ambitious, feasible, and compelling, sets the direction. The leader must be able to articulate the vision in ways that make people want to participate in making it a reality. They must be able to create a shared sense of purpose that marshals resources in the direction of that vision and its goals.

It all starts with the vision – the idea. Developing and holding a vision takes courage and the ability to think big. Don't hold back. A big, bold, audacious vision can be a competitive and strategic advantage.

If you are living your dream, you can help others live theirs. Take time to dream and think, believe in yourself and your ideas, behave and act positively. Break down your vision into ambitious but achievable goals.

Find and surround yourself with like-minded believers and treat them with respect.

These skills are innate in some. And some learn them. In the best cases, leadership skills develop naturally from the compelling nature of the initial vision. In other words, even the leader is in thrall to the vision and feels compelled to make it happen.

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A truly great idea is always bigger than any individual while still needing them to manifest it.

Harvard Business School professor Howard Stevenson stated:

"Entrepreneurship is the process by which individuals pursue opportunities without regard to the resources they currently control."

Bismarck defined statesmanship as the art of the possible. Both these ideas are at the heart of leadership.

A leader must articulate a vision that is both desirable and feasible. Followers need to share the desire to achieve the goal and feel it is possible to attain it.

CHAPTER 3

TIMING

Timing is a trait a leader must possess and develop. As part of the feasibility of the vision, the development and convergence of enabling technologies, channels, and markets need to be understood and conveyed.

Wayne Gretzky said,

"Skate where the puck is going, not where it's been."



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*I skate to where the
puck is going to be,
not where it has
been.*

Wayne Gretzky

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It is critically important to develop a sense of timing and position. The early bird gets the worm, but the second mouse gets the cheese. That can mean persistence or waiting until the enablers are distinctly on the horizon.



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*You don't get
lucky , You get
in position.*
Kenny Dalglish
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CHAPTER 4

LEADERSHIP IS AN ART

The art of leadership lies between navigating being too early with a vision that is yet to be feasible, and being too late and losing an opportunity to the competition.

This balance means continuously monitoring the changing technological, social, demographic, economic, legislative, political, and competitive demands of your business environment and how those changes impact implementing your vision.

CHAPTER 5

LEADERSHIP REQUIRES STRATEGIC THINKING.

Strategic thinking means continuously monitoring the external environment and being ready to revise tactics to meet the strategy goals.

It requires consistency and discipline to remain faithful to the plan and the flexibility to change both plan and strategy when circumstances change. You must persist *and* pivot.

CHAPTER 6

CHANGE IS THE ONLY CONSTANT.

Leaders must have a certain comfort level with change and ambiguity. Leaders need to develop the ability to objectively assess the organization's and its stakeholders' changing needs.

There is an old Chinese saying,

"Sometimes the river flows East, and sometimes the river flows West."

Things change with time, and different ways of perceiving emerge. We must be aware of these changes and go with the flow.

. . .

The ability to detect emerging patterns and help them take shape is essential to leadership. It is also critical to identify converging technological and social waves.

CHAPTER 7

MOMENTUM

A leader needs a passionate vision, skills to communicate that vision, and strategic thinking and implementation skills to make that vision a reality. Focus on keeping things moving forward. Leaders are obligated to provide and maintain the momentum.

You will ultimately learn leadership and how to wield it by being in thrall to a compelling vision of the future in which you want to participate actively.

It will act like a natural force, like gravity, guiding you like a pole star. If you can articulate your vision convincingly to yourself and others, they will follow you, and you will follow it.

The practical skills to manage and master the processes of leading are consensus-building and decision-making. In our modern world, organizations are formed like mosaics of the

skill sets required to meet certain goals by carrying out specific tasks.

A leader needs to build consensus around the vision and generate momentum in a constant series of decision-making. In more lateral, flatter, and less hierarchical organizations, the ability to carry out these tasks is achieved through negotiation.



LEADERSHIP IS THE
ART OF
ACCOMPLISHING
MORE THAN THE
SCIENCE OF
MANAGEMENT SAYS
IS POSSIBLE.

COLIN POWELL

www.mba-asap.com

Management and leadership are closely related and overlap, to varying degrees, based on the personality and situation. Here are some ways to look at the differences:

- The manager asks how and when; the leader asks what and why.
 - The manager accepts the status quo; the leader challenges it.
 - The manager has his eye on the bottom line; the leader has his eye on the horizon.

Leaders are constantly questioning:

- What are we doing now that we should stop doing?
 - What are we not doing now but should start doing?
 - What are we doing now that we should continue to do but perhaps in a fundamentally different way?

These probing inquiries are significant and applicable to everything the organization does:

- Its products and services
- Internal processes
- Policies and procedures
- Strategies
- Dealing with complexity and change
- The fit between the enterprise and the environment

This questioning stance is part of a continuous process and mindset.



CHAPTER 8

EXECUTION IS CRITICAL

A word of caution: the following makes it sound like leaders do all the sexy and cool work. They do, but don't be seduced into thinking leadership is all silver-tongued articulation of vision and management is something prosaic, unintellectual, and not worth much effort.

Superior execution trumps everything else in business. Excellent management skills are based on understanding and being able to implement in practice the critical concepts of how to marshal and direct resources in order to accomplish defined goals. You can't be an effective leader if no one is following or you are not going anywhere.

CHAPTER 9

KNOW WHEN TO HOLD 'EM AND WHEN TO FOLD 'EM

You must balance planning and reacting to opportunities to be an effective leader. You must decide when to plow forward and persevere in the face of obstacles. You must know when to change direction to out-flank obstacles or, even more radically, change the game altogether and pivot.

You must have the wisdom of when to persevere and when to pivot and trust in your convictions. This concept is as artful as life itself. Knowing what you can control and what you can't is art. Leadership is an art.

Effective leadership is about communicating a powerful vision and continuously questioning and examining assumptions. It is also the ability to think and act strategically. You must develop alternative scenarios of the future, and assess and decisively pick the best one to pursue.

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You need to remain realistic in your thinking without losing the power of imagination and be comfortable with continuously updating your models of the world. The wider ranging and flexible your curiosity, the more powerful and accurate you will be as a leader.

Being a generalist with broad interests is also a plus since you are aware of technological, social, and demographic changes and critical changes in the legislative and political arenas. These all can affect the status and direction of an enterprise.

CHAPTER 10

LEADERS AND EXPERTS

Strategic thinking is a leadership activity quite different from what experts do. Strategic thinkers specialize in relationships and context, whereas expert thinkers specialize in well-defined disciplines and functions. A leader thinks in conceptual systems and their interrelationships.

INCOMPLETE INFORMATION

Strategic thinkers act on intuition and instinct when information is incomplete. When data is incomplete, they focus on action, whereas experts pay rigorous attention to knowledge, evidence, and data; they focus on understanding.

A leader needs to employ strategic thinking and embrace an intellectual process that accepts change and ambiguity, analyzes the causes and outcomes of change, and attempts to direct an organization's future to capitalize on the changes.

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Leading in a rapidly changing environment means you must analyze while still being decisive. You have to understand you will never have complete information or a perfect understanding of the outcome. You must be opportunistic and act with only partial and imperfect knowledge in imperfect circumstances. Teddy Roosevelt said:

"Do what you can, with what you have, where you are."

Rational preplanned strategies do not always work out as planned and must be adaptable.



Dealing with rapid, complex, and often discontinuous change requires flexible leadership. This means understanding the nature and implications of external change, the ability to develop effective strategies that account for change, and the will as well as the ability to actively manage the organization's momentum.

. . .

Strategy isn't static and changes in course will emerge; one must be aware and willing to adapt and pivot.

"It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change."

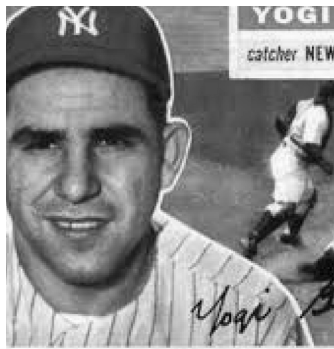
Charles Darwin

As leaders, we are not simply being responsive to changes; we are charged with creating the future. The best way to predict the future is to create it. Create new visions for success and be prepared to make significant improvements along the way.

CHAPTER 11

THE BEST WAY TO PREDICT THE FUTURE

Our understanding of the future is hazy at best and impacts our clear idea of direction and purpose. To make an idea a reality often means 'groping' your way to your goal.



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*It's tough to make
predictions, especially
about the future*

Yogi Berra

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Groping is a process of trying things and monitoring feedback as to their success. If something works, keep doing it and allo-

cate more resources in that direction. If something doesn't work, tweak and adjust the process and see if anything positive results; if not, abandon that path.

Testing two variations at once and comparing results is called A/B testing. A/B testing has become popular as online methods to employ and measure it have become available. Google has been an innovator in developing and providing A/B testing methodologies. Groping is a forward-leaning methodology that leaders should apply.

Leadership takes constant active vigilance. If the strategy is not actively managed, it will not happen. In his excellent book *Leadership is an Art* Max DePree says,

"The only legitimate work in an organization is work that contributes to the accomplishment of the strategic plan. It takes the orchestration of management as well as leadership to perpetuate these capabilities into the future."

When it comes to the relationship between strategy and leadership, let's distinguish between planning and plans. Plans are static documents that are by definition out of date and lack relevance. Planning is the process of analyzing future scenarios and contingencies and coming up with effective ways to exploit or avoid them.

Eisenhower put it succinctly:

"Plans are useless, but planning is invaluable."



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Plans are useless, but
planning is
indispensable.

Dwight D Eisenhower

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Here is a list of qualities that David Ogilvy looked for in creative leaders:

- High standards of personal ethics
- Big people, without pettiness
- Guts under pressure, resilience in defeat
- Brilliant brains – not safe plodders
- A capacity for hard work and midnight oil
- Charisma – charm and persuasiveness
- A streak of unorthodoxy – creative innovators
- The courage to make tough decisions
- Inspiring enthusiasts – with trust and gusto
- A sense of humor

These are traits to look for in others and to aspire to in yourself.



CHAPTER 12

LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNICATION

Effective communication involves the right people getting the right information at the right time. Our job is to target the message and the timing.

Leaders communicate and drive the organization by articulating a common mission, shared vision, and shared values and goals. These elements define the essential vision of the organization and greatly depend on the leadership's ability to communicate it.

CHAPTER 13

STRATEGIC FIT

There needs to be a fit between the direction and vision of what the organization wants to do and what the organization *can* do.

Figuring this out takes gathering the organization's resources, competencies, and capabilities. You need to create the organizational capabilities to achieve the stated strategic goals and match the messaging to that fit. It is an utter waste of time to encourage people to do things they don't have the resources to achieve.

Email is an excellent tool for disseminating the message and creating clear, unambiguous communication. Here are ten tips from a great communicator David Ogilvy:

"Good writing is not a natural gift. You have to learn to write well. Here are ten hints:

1. Read the Roman-Raphaelson book on writing. Read it three times.

2. Write the way you talk. Naturally.

3. Use short words, short sentences, and short paragraphs.

4. Never use jargon words like 'conceptualize,' 'demassification,' 'attitudinally,' 'judgmentally.' They are hallmarks of pretense.

5. Never write more than two pages on any subject.

6. Check your quotations.

7. Never send a letter or a memo on the day you write it. Read it aloud the next morning—and then edit it.

8. If it is something important, get a colleague to improve it.

9. Before you send your letter or your memo, make sure it is crystal-clear what you want the recipient to do.

10. If you want ACTION, don't write. Go and tell the guy what you want."

David Ogilvy wrote this memo to his staff. We need to aspire to write well and communicate as effectively.

CHAPTER 14

WRITE LIKE THE CIA

Here are some more tips on writing clearly for effective communication from the CIA manual (the CIA Style Guide is available at <http://fas.org/irp/cia/product/style.pdf>):

- Keep the language crisp and pungent; prefer the forthright to the pompous and ornate.
- Do not stray from the subject; omit the extraneous, no matter how brilliant it may seem or even be.
- Favor the active voice and shun streams of polysyllables and prepositional phrases.
- Keep sentences and paragraphs short, and vary the structure of both.
- Be frugal in the use of adjectives and adverbs; let nouns and verbs show their own power.

The CIA understands that their intelligence reporting is only as good as their communication ability. Stay focused and stick

to the subject. Be clear about what you want done. Look at every word in a sentence and decide if they are really needed. If not, kill them. Be ruthless.

CHAPTER 15

POWER POSITIONS IN WRITING

Pay special attention to the power positions in your writing. These are:

- Title
- First Sentence
- Transition sentences
- Argument sentence
- Theme sentence
- Final Sentence

Maintain emphasis on what is significant: the Purpose, the Call to Action, the Take-away, the Promise. Think of the reader asking, "So what?" while reading your piece, and answer that question continuously while writing it. What are you asking the reader to do? Describe and point to future directions that inspire with a challenge or rallying call.

• • •

The Recap is especially important since you state what you want there. Link back to the intro, but remember the recapitulation is not a repeat of what has come before. State it differently and get your point across. Finish strong. Make it memorable. Make it sticky.

In today's world, we can rely on email, Slack, Zoom, and other technologies to bring people together to work effectively without concerns about geography.

We don't need to be in the same office any longer. We can contract with people with specific skill sets to create and organize teams to fulfill certain goals on a project-oriented basis. These developments generate flatter, less hierarchical organizations based on networks.

We rely on a mosaic of individuals and organizations over whom we exercise no direct control to accomplish our work and meet our needs.

Purposeful leadership and management in these situations takes negotiation skills. And that is the subject of another book.

CHAPTER 16

LEAD WISELY

PRACTICE HUMILITY. AND LISTEN MORE.

While beneficial in many ways, intelligence can also be a burden on making good decisions. Having greater intelligence can sometimes make you a more foolish person because intelligence breeds hubris. When people start thinking they are smart relative to those around them, they develop blind spots to cognitive biases that ultimately compromise their ability to understand the world.

BIAS TOWARDS ACTION

On the other hand, one can overthink a decision or defer making one while continuing to ruminate. This situation is known as paralysis by analysis. Good leaders have a bias towards action.

Act, gather feedback, and course correct.

. . .

Intelligence can also hamper learning. Intelligence can be a hindrance that prevents you from moving past mistakes or learning from them.

Intelligent people find it more challenging to be aware of their biases. When we become aware of our ingrained biases, we move from intelligence to wisdom.

AVOID HUBRIS

Be humble about your abilities. Greek tragedies are based on the consequences of hubris. Intelligence can actively impair our ability to make good decisions because we believe in our own superiority.

Relying too much on raw intelligence can come at the cost of listening to others' points of view and considering new ideas. Remember: You need as many ideas as you can get.

You will not have to exert leadership overtly if you surround yourself with stellar people. Give them a direction, turn them loose, and be open to the various ways of approaching problems and attaining solutions that they come up with.

LISTEN TO OTHERS AND CONSIDER NEW IDEAS.

Here is some more sage advice from Warren Bennis:

"There are two ways of being creative. One can sing and dance. Or one can create an environment in which singers

and dancers flourish."

He also said:

"I am reminded how hollow the label of leadership sometimes is and how heroic fellowship can be."

In other words, it is not always about overtly being out in front leading a charge.

"Because the awakened one puts himself behind, he steps ahead. Because he gives way, he gains. Because he is selfless, he fulfills himself. The still is the lord of the restless."

Lao-Tzu



“
*Knowing others is
 intelligence; knowing yourself
 is true wisdom. Mastering
 others is strength; mastering
 yourself is true power*
 Lao Tzu
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



John Cousins (@jccousins) is an investor, tech founder, and bestselling author of *Understanding Corporate Finance* and over 40 other books.

John is the founder of MBA ASAP, which provides training to individuals and corporations including Adidas, Apple, General Mills, Kaiser Permanente, Lyft, PayPal, Pinterest, Mercedes-Benz, and Volkswagen.

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