



# Executive Book Summaries®

*First, Know Yourself*

## ON BECOMING A LEADER

*By Warren Bennis*

### THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

**T**his summary examines the evolutionary process by which managers become leaders. This transformation, although not easy, is simpler than you might think. As a manager, you can draw from an inventory of experiences, observations, vision, and other qualities which, if used to overcome inertia, can transform you into an effective leader.

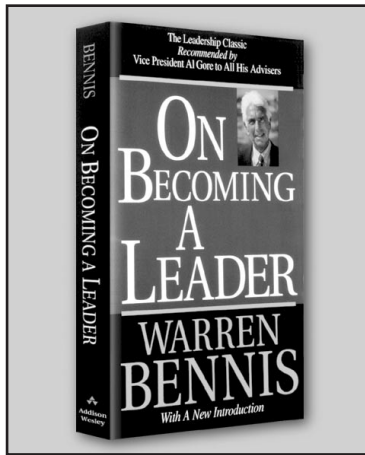
Leaders must know themselves thoroughly before they can hope to lead others. This self-knowledge comes through listening to your inner voice, accepting responsibility for who you are, learning in greater depth than the average person, and reflecting on the unique experiences you have had throughout your life. Mistakes are inevitable, but they, too, contribute to your growth and development.

You must also know the world as thoroughly as you know yourself. World knowledge comes through a host of experiences, including extensive travel, a rewarding private life, key associations with mentors and groups, and continuing education.

You must allow yourself to emerge as a leader by applying to the way you do your job the wisdom and insight gained from your reflections on life's lessons.

Change is the only constant in a leader's life. Consequently, you must resign yourself to work within an environment that's forever evolving, adapting, and adjusting to serendipity. Your skills will be forged within this dynamic crucible, and the more tests you survive, the more likely you are to become a good leader. Adversity, which is inherent in the process, is itself a positive and maturing experience.

Leaders are only as successful as their subordinates. You must earn the trust of those beneath you by demonstrating constancy of purpose, being reliable, and displaying integrity. Your organization must support your efforts by maintain a mentoring atmosphere whose tone, pace, and values instruct managers positively and help them to achieve their full potential.



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### **SELECTED BY SOUNDVIEW AS AN OUTSTANDING BOOK FOR BUSINESS PEOPLE**

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### **THE SUMMARY**

**L**eaders share a common passion for the promises of life and the ability to express themselves fully. This free and joyous self-expression is the essence of leadership, but it has a prerequisite: You must first know yourself. Genuine leaders know who they are; they recognize and exercise their strengths and acknowledge and compensate for their weaknesses. They also know what they want, why, and how to communicate those wants to others in a fashion that elicits cooperation and support.

Secondly, the world itself seems out of control. The changes of the last generation have been so radical that it seems even in business as if the world plays soccer while America plays football. It's not just the rules that have changed. The game itself has changed.

For this reason, before you can learn to lead you must learn a great deal about this strange new world that we all inhabit. If not, you'll likely end up being absorbed by it instead of leading it.

#### **Learning to Lead**

Becoming a leader isn't easy. If it were, we'd have a great many more. But learning to lead is a lot easier than you might think, because every manager possesses an inventory of raw materials to use to become a genuine leader. These materials consist of experiences, observations, vision, and a variety of other factors. The key lies in molding them in a form and fashion that are unique to your own particular circumstances and that turn them to your advantage in the situation at hand, whatever it may

be and whatever it requires.

Although everyone can become a leader, not everyone will. Why? Because too many people are prisoners of their own inertia. They lack the will to change and to develop their potential. People who are willing to overcome inertia can transform themselves if they want to badly enough. Becoming a true leader is the ultimate act of free will, and if you have that will, you will find your way.

Leadership comes by evolution rather than a series of individual lessons. The process has no beginning, middle, or end, but it has several recurring and overlapping themes — the need for formal and informal education, the need to unlearn erroneous lessons, the need to reflect on what you have learned, the need to take risks and make mistakes, and the need to master the task at hand.

#### **OUR LEADERSHIP ENVIRONMENT**

Our quality of life depends on the quality of our leaders. If you've ever dreamed of becoming a leader, now's the time to try to make those dreams reality. The future needs a legacy from today's leaders, and there are far too few to answer the challenge.

#### **A Leadership Crisis**

Leaders are vitally important today for three basic reasons. First, the success or failure of all organizations rests on the perceived quality of the people at the top. Even stock prices are influenced by the public's perception of corporate leadership. Witness a case several years ago in which an ineffective company president died and the market price of the firm's stock shot up overnight. It was an unflattering but unequivocal expression of investors' opinions of his leadership.

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## Guidelines to Success in Leadership

Here are ten guidelines that will help you as a leader and your organization to rise above chaos and thrive on change and ambiguity. These elements form the basis for survival into the twenty-first century. They are:

- 1. Manage the dream.** Communicate your vision to others, recruit meticulously, reward and retrain your people, and reorganize as circumstances dictate.
- 2. Embrace error.** Create an atmosphere that encourages your people to take risks. Assure them with words and actions that the only mistake is to do nothing.
- 3. Encourage reflective back talk.** Know the importance of having someone in your life, perhaps a spouse or peer, who will tell you the truth.
- 4. Encourage dissent.** Surround yourself with devil's advocates who will tell you the difference between what you expect and what could really happen.
- 5. Display optimism, faith, and hope.** These

qualities are contagious. Your subordinates will pick them up and embrace them, too.

- 6. Expect the best from your people.** This encourages them to expand beyond self-imposed or artificial limitations and excel in ways that may surprise both you and them.
- 7. Develop a sense of "touch."** Cultivate the ability to discern where the external environment is heading and how your organization must change if it is to grow and flourish within that future setting.
- 8. Take the long view.** Keep your eyes on the horizon and refuse to become a slave to short-term, bottom-line thinking.
- 9. Maintain stakeholder symmetry.** Balance the competing claims of each internal and external group that has an interest in your organization.
- 10. Create strategic alliances and partnerships.** Recognize the value and wisdom of creating ties with other organizations whose future is aligned with yours.

The second reason is that the change and upheaval of past years have left us with no place to hide. We need visionary navigators who can substitute clearly charted courses for dead reckoning.

The third reason why leaders are so necessary is that we as a nation are alarmed at the pervasive erosion of the integrity of our institutions.

Not so long ago, on Wall Street, a person's word was considered to be a binding contract. Prominent evangelists were thought to practice what they preached. To those in high places, lying or cheating was tantamount to professional suicide. Today, however, getting caught in such acts seems far more distressing to the people involved than the acts themselves. Shame and embarrassment have yielded to arrogance and bald-faced denials, no matter how damning the evidence. Greed, timidity, and lack of vision are rampant among the current crop of pseudoleaders. We need leaders who will rise above those tawdry standards.

### UNDERSTANDING THE BASICS

The mythical "look of a leader" is precisely that - a myth. Leaders come in all sizes, shapes, and dispositions. What they share in common, however, are several basic ingredients:

- **Guiding vision.** Effective leaders have a clear idea of what they want to do in both their professional and personal lives. They also possess the strength to pursue this vision despite the inevitable

setbacks and failures.

- **Passion.** Leaders love what they do, love to do it, and communicate their passion in inspire others.
- **Integrity.** This facet of a leader has three elements. The first is self-knowledge. Leaders know their strengths and weaknesses. They understand what they want to do and why. They never lie to themselves.

The second is candor, a dedication to honest thoughts and actions. This is the key to self-knowledge.

The third is maturity. Rather than showing the way or giving orders, leaders learn by following. They earn their status through dedication, observation, and working with and through others successfully and honestly.

- **Trust.** This is more a product of leadership than an ingredient of it. Trust is the one quality that cannot be acquired. It must be earned.

- **Curiosity and daring.** Leaders want to learn as much as they can, and they're willing to take risks, experiment, and innovate in the process. They wring knowledge and wisdom from every mistake and learn from adversity.

### Codifying Your Thinking

Managers who seek the mantle of leadership must codify their thoughts by speaking or writing what's on their minds. Writing is the most profound way to do this, because when you write, you

focus and express your thoughts more effectively. Writing is the best way to plumb the depths of your feelings and learn who you are and what you believe.

Newspaper editor Gloria Anderson said, “It’s vital for people to develop their own sense of themselves and their role in the world, and it’s equally vital for them to try new things, to test themselves and their beliefs and principles. I think we long for people who will stand up for what they believe, even if we don’t agree with them, because we have confidence in such people.”

The current buzzword for people who don’t fit Anderson’s description is “empty suits.” Lacking self-knowledge and codified thinking, “empty suit” executives borrow postures, spout secondhand ideas, and devote themselves to fitting in rather than standing out. Camouflaging yourself this way can be hazardous to your reputation and career, however.

Lucky Stores CEO Don Ritchey said, “I believe people spot phonies in very short order, whether that be on an individual basis or a company basis. As Emerson says, ‘What you are speaks so loudly I cannot hear what you say.’”

As an aspiring leader, you must discover your own native energies and desires and find your own way to act on them. When you’ve done that, you’ve become the author of your own destiny. No matter what the future holds, you can be content to know that you have played the game that was natural for you to play.

### Enjoy Your Journey

The goals that you pursue aren’t worth arriving at unless you enjoy the journey, because success comes by short, well-contemplated hops — not by giant leaps. Says Norman Lear, “You have to look at success incrementally. It takes too long to get to any major success. If one can look at life as being successful on a moment-by-moment basis, one might find that most of it is successful. And take the bow inside for it. When we wait for the big bows, it’s a lousy bargain. They don’t come but once in too long a time.”

## KNOWING YOURSELF

By the time you reached puberty, your family, friends, school, and society in general had told you — by word and example — how to be. But people begin to become leaders at the moment when they decide for themselves how to be.

It takes courage and determination to know yourself. You must separate who you are and who you want to be from what the world thinks you are and wants you to be. Some managers come to know themselves early in life; others such as Franklin

Roosevelt and Harry Truman did this much later in life. Regardless of when self-knowledge arrives, you must realize that achieving and maintaining self-knowledge is a lifetime process. Exploring your own depths and reflecting on your experiences are ongoing activities. They’re an integral part of the lifelong adventure of seeking, evolving, becoming, and knowing who you really are.

Some people strike out on a quest for self-knowledge because they don’t like who they are or what they’re doing. They resolve to become masters of their own fate. Others, like Truman when he became president, are confronted by events and circumstances that force them to grow beyond their self-imposed boundaries. Regardless of your catalyst, you will find self-knowledge brings tangible and intangible rewards, because if you continue to do what you’ve always done, you’ll continue to get what you’ve always got — which may be less than you want or deserve.

### Four Lessons of Self-Knowledge

Only you can take charge of your life and express yourself, but there are four lessons that many successful leaders have learned that you should employ in the process:

- **Lesson one:** Listen to your inner self. Astute managers realize when they have fallen short of their own potential. They know, too, that learning is a way out of the trap and a step toward self-expression. If this is your case, you must acquire whatever tools are necessary to rise above your professional or intellectual shortcomings, confining boss, stagnant organization, or dead-end job and reach for a higher plane. The alternative to ignoring your inner self is to settle for less than you are capable of. Major stumbling blocks on this path to self-knowledge are denial and blame.

- **Lesson two:** Accept responsibility for what you are. Blame no one. Taking charge of your life also means that you accept responsibility for your own success or failure. Bosses and companies may come and go, but your own inherent abilities, learning experiences, viewpoints, and personal qualities are portable assets that will always be at your command. They’re your unique inventory of constants in an ever-changing world. If you discover through introspection that you need more knowledge, get it. If you need broader experience, seek it, find it, and move forward.

- **Lesson three:** Learn at a deeper level than most people. This aspect of self-knowledge deals with more than just absorbing information or mastering a discipline. It’s seeing the world both as it is and as it could be, understanding what you see,

and acting on that understanding. Your level of learning extends beyond just learning facts. Rather, you embrace the information, absorb it, and acquire, in the process, a level of understanding more profound than that of the average person.

● **Lesson four:** True understanding comes from reflecting on your experience. There's an academic maxim that understanding occurs at three levels. At the first level, you learn a subject. At the next, you teach it. At the last and highest level, you write about it. Understanding grows with each step, and each step demands that you reflect on the one before it. Reflection enhances and adds value to your experience.

Perhaps the most effective way to reflect on your experience is to have a dialogue with yourself. In this fashion you discover the truth of yourself and your life. What really happened? What did it do to you? What did it mean to you? In this way, you can locate and acquire the knowledge you need to become, in Goethe's phrase, a hammer rather than an anvil.

### **Your Experience Is a Key**

Each of us is an enormous biological and social phenomenon, a product of genes, environment, family, friends, schools, accidents, and more. What distinguishes leaders from everyone else is that they take all of those elements and use them to reformulate themselves in a new and unique way.

By taking mental inventory of your life's experiences, you take stock of yourself, realizing that you're as much a product of your experiences as your skills. Unlike everyone else, however, leaders use their experiences as stepping stones to self-knowledge.

### **KNOWING THE WORLD**

True leaders are obsessed with knowing the world as thoroughly as they know themselves. This knowledge comes through extensive travel, a rewarding private life, key associations with mentors and groups, and broad and continuing education.

Universities are not always the best place to expand your worldly horizons. Too many schools produce throngs of narrow-minded specialists who, although wizards at making money, are unfinished as people. They have been taught how to do; they have not learned how to be. Courses in philosophy, history, and literature are infinitely more developmental and inspiring than courses in accounting, marketing research, or computer programming.

### **Ambition Vs Growth**

Your pursuit of world knowledge is a quest to see

how things can be different, but big institutions and society, whether public or private, often expect people to toe the line in a host of ways — personal, political, and ideological. This is no revelation. You probably know people who have gotten ahead by conforming rather than going against the grain.

If you would keep ambition from stunting your intellectual growth, however, you must not be afraid to lose, to say something that people might think is wrong or crazy, or to say something the institution isn't ready to hear yet.

### **Learning from Adversity**

Many leaders believe that mistakes are necessary and synonymous with growth and progress.

They realize that people who rarely make mistakes are frequently reluctant to take risks and strike out on their own. They prefer to play it safe, but by doing so they turn in a mediocre performance.

According to Shirley Hufstедler, a lawyer, former judge, and former U.S. secretary of education, "If you haven't failed, you haven't tried very hard."

### **OPERATING ON INSTINCT**

In our efforts to simplify our lives, we doggedly attempt to reduce life to bumper-sticker dimensions. Advocates of simplicity see reality as mechanical, segmented, and rational, when it is in fact organic, whole, and ambiguous. Predictability is the exception, not the rule.

Prominent leaders consistently report that they rely as much on intuition and conceptual skills as on logic and analytical talents. CEOs must possess both administrative and imaginative gifts. One reason why so few corporate executives have successfully made the leap from capable manager to genuine leader is that corporate cultures, like society as a whole, recognize and reward quantifiable, bottom-line, left-brain achievements. People with these achievements get the promotions. Qualitative, innovative, right-brain accomplishments tend to be discounted, and these potentially great leaders are passed over in the promotion process.

Writer, producer, and CEO Norman Lear encourages would-be leaders to heed their inner voice, because "..... when we forgo our own thoughts and opinions, they end up coming back to us from the mouths of others ..... When I've been most effective, I've followed that inner voice."

### **LETTING YOURSELF EMERGE**

After you've mastered the context of leadership, gotten to know yourself and the world, and become comfortable heeding your instincts when

## Bennis Studies Leaders to Learn About Leadership

“The techniques of leadership,” wrote Frederick and John Dyer, “are admittedly the most mysterious and the most difficult to teach. Yet, in the long run, the very fact that the (person) is trying to be a good leader shows through. People become what they seek to be.”

A study of leadership must scrutinize successful leaders in many fields and identify the special blend of attitudes, techniques, principles, and values that they have employed throughout their rich and varied careers. This is no simple task. Nevertheless, Warren Bennis has done it surpassingly well. He examines a human tapestry of acknowledged leaders in such fields as entertain-

ment, newspaper publishing, finance, education, politics, medicine, science, law, athletics, and business.

Studying leaders isn't nearly as orderly and predictable as studying the physical world, because people are anything but orderly and predictable. And leadership itself? Well, it's a lot like beauty: hard to define, but you know it when you see it. In the course of his career, Bennis has seen leadership often, and he has distilled the results of his observations into his writing. It's a summary of how people become leaders, how they lead others, and how organizations encourage or stifle the potential leaders in their midst.

appropriate, you must express yourself as a leader by letting your true self emerge and take charge.

### Reflection Teaches from the Past

Reflection, you'll recall, was one of the four lessons that led to self-knowledge. Reflection is also the means by which you learn from past experiences so you can resolve them and broaden your self-confidence as a leader.

Reflection makes learning tangible and conscious. It helps you put experiences into perspective and get to the heart of the matter. Adequate reflection clarifies the meaning of what happened to you and the course of action you should take as a result of your experiences. Your aggregate experience is the foundation for the rest of your life, and that foundation is as solid as the degree to which you have reflected on it, understood it, and achieved a workable resolution about its significance and impact on the person you've become.

### The Value of Perspective

Leaders who are trying to express themselves fully and truly must have a perspective, a point of view that's authentic and unique to them.

John Sculley, chairman and CEO of Apple Computers, emphasizes the value of placing your experiences in perspective. “Shifting your stance changes you,” says Sculley. “You take the same set of facts and shift the vantage point and everything looks different. One of the things leaders have to be good at is perspective. Leaders don't necessarily have to invent ideas, but they have to be able to put them in context and add perspective ..... What I look for in people is the ability to transform their experience into ideas and put those ideas in context.”

### Steps to Self-Expression

Emerging leaders must set tangible, focused goals for themselves. Vague goals are virtually worthless. Overly specific goals are equally worthless, however, because they're so precise that they exclude many alternatives and lack flexibility.

According to attorney Jamie Raskin, “It's more important to have ambitions in terms of the way you want to live your life, and then the other things will flow out of that.”

As an aspiring leader, you can set goals through which to express yourself by following four steps:

1. Identify what you want and what you are capable of doing, and recognize the difference.
2. Identify the things that drive you and experiences that give you satisfaction, and know the difference between the two.
3. Clarify your personal values and priorities and those of your organization, and measure the difference between the two.
4. Having taken the first three steps, ask yourself if you are able and willing to tackle the obstacles that stand in your way.

The first step's issues are fairly basic. All of us must reconcile wants with capabilities throughout our lives, and some degree of compromise may be necessary. An undersized athlete may compromise by pursuing a coaching career, a singer with a mediocre voice may turn to songwriting, and so on.

The issues in the second step are more complex. Executives who are driven to succeed at all costs are often unfulfilled, one-dimensional people. It is possible to succeed and satisfy yourself, but only if you're wise and honest enough to admit what you want and recognize that you must achieve those wants through work that is inherently fulfilling and gratifying.

When you come to the third step, you must carefully evaluate the degree of flex in yourself and your organization. Some lockstep corporate cultures demand absolute obedience to the company credo, while others are more laid-back and adaptable. After analyzing the amount of flex in yourself and your organization, you can decide whether you're trying to express yourself in an acceptable (and accepting) environment or if you should join a different organization, one whose culture is more in harmony with your personal values and priorities.

The fourth step demands intense introspection and reflection. Your decision about whether to tackle the obstacles that bar your way to self-expression may cause you to maintain your present course or chart an entirely new one in a different field or organization. Either way you're ahead, because you are taking the necessary steps to let your true self emerge.

## MOVING THROUGH CHAOS

Leaders operate in chaotic, unpredictable environments where the only constant is change. Consequently, they must accept the fact that they will learn by doing. They must learn where the challenges are, where the task is unprogrammed, where the job is being done for the first time.

Effective leaders galvanize the resources of their organizations to make the changes necessary to achieve their unique vision of how things should be. But unless you continue to evolve, adapt, and adjust to external change, your organization will eventually stall. In other words, you must possess the ability to use your experiences to grow within your job. True leaders are forged in a crucible of experience, and the more experience and tests you survive, the more likely you are to become a good leader.

### Expect Adversity

Their high profiles make leaders attractive targets both inside and outside their organizations. When you're king of the hill, everyone seems to be gunning for you.

According to a study by behavioral scientists Michael Lombardo and Morgan McCall at the Center for Creative Leadership, adversity is as random and prevalent in leaders' lives as good luck.

Executives' ascensions are anything but orderly. Throughout their careers, top managers encounter such problems as failure, demotions, being passed over for promotion, traumatic mergers and takeovers, reorganizations, and office politics. Such obstacles are an integral part of the leadership experience, and you must gird yourself to deal with them and reflect on their learning value.

Ernest Hemingway said that the world breaks all

of us, and we grow stronger in the broken places. That's certainly true of leaders. Their ability to rebound from adversity permits them to achieve and to realize their vision.

## GETTING PEOPLE ON YOUR SIDE

Charisma isn't an essential leadership quality.

Many leaders, despite a lack of charisma, still manage to inspire trust and loyalty in others, and in that way get things done.

Some leaders, too, place a high value on empathy. Although many leaders may lack it and still succeed, those who possess it tend to engender more support from their people.

In addition to empathy, effective leaders make others believe that the leaders' vision is worthwhile for subordinates to follow and those subordinates will be better off by following.

Lucky Stores' Don Ritchey observes, "A real essential for effective leadership is that you can't force people to do very much. They have to want to, and most times I think they want to if they respect the individual who is out in front, and if they have confidence that the person has some sort of vision for the company."

### Generating Trust

Willing followers must trust their leaders, but trust cannot be mandated. As a leader, you will earn the trust of those beneath you by consistently employing four qualities:

- 1. Constancy.** Stay on course and remain dedicated to your vision.
- 2. Congruity.** Display and confirm your values, theories, and beliefs in everything you say and do.
- 3. Reliability.** Support your co-workers in moments that matter. Be there for them and with them when it counts.
- 4. Integrity.** Honor your commitments and promises. Let your word be your bond.

Ultimately, your ability to gather the support and respect of your co-workers depends on how well you know yourself, how well you understand the needs of your people, and the degree to which you earn their trust by employing those four qualities.

## HELP OR HINDER

Such forces as technology, global interdependence, mergers and acquisitions, deregulation, and shifting demographics and values have fundamentally transformed the way that business is done today. Only by changing themselves can American organizations get back on track in this globally competitive environment.

## People — the Greatest Asset

The last great change in American business took place between 1890 and 1910 when the modern corporation was created. Today it is time for another transformation. This one will transform how organizations deal with their workers.

Employees are the primary resource of any enterprise, but too often management sees them as liabilities instead of assets. This archaic attitude prevents the organization from fully using its major resource in its effort to remake itself. Like individuals, organizations must learn from experience to deploy themselves and all of their assets. Organizations must lead, not merely manage, if they are to fulfill their potential.

Only a handful of organizations have really begun to tap into their “people power.” Indeed, many have taken the opposite tack, eschewing loyalty to workers, pruning rather than nurturing, and focusing almost exclusively on the bottom line. In *Thriving on Chaos*, Tom Peters says that organizations that succeed over time will have the following characteristics in common:

- A flatter, less hierarchical structure
- More autonomous units
- An orientation toward high-value-added products and services
- Quality controls
- Service controls
- Responsiveness
- Innovative speed
- Flexibility
- Highly trained and skilled workers who use their minds as well as their hands
- Leaders, rather than managers, at all levels

### Offer Opportunities

Leaders must ensure that their organizations offer employees the kinds of experience that will enable them to learn and, finally, to lead. Because managers become leaders through experience, workers must have the opportunity to learn through their

work in an environment that permits growth and change and tolerates the inevitable mistakes that will happen as people stretch their personal boundaries in the process of learning and growing.

### Opportunity = Empowerment

Organizations should give executives leadership opportunities early in their careers. These opportunities should include rotation among departments and divisions, line-to-staff transfers (which develop strategic, conceptual, and tactical skills), special project work, task force assignments, troubleshooting responsibilities, and overseas posts.

While many companies employ these standard techniques with good success, others have gone beyond the norm by allowing younger executives to start new entities from venture capital pools, operate smaller, low-margin subsidiaries, and attempt to salvage troubled divisions instead of selling them off.

### LEADERS CONTROL TOMORROW

Becoming a leader is a lifelong adventure of discovery. To become a genuine leader you must master the context of the leadership environment, learn and employ the basic ingredients of leadership, become intimate with your true self, reflect on and resolve significant life experiences, and chart the boundaries of the world in which you live.

Leaders frequently rely on their instincts as much as their skills, which means that you must learn to trust and heed your instincts in a host of management situations where you find yourself setting, rather than following, precedent.

Making the transition from manager to leader is a profound experience. You must allow your true self to emerge by knowing your wants, capabilities, ambitions, satisfying experiences, and personal and organizational values and priorities. Armed with this knowledge, genuine leaders possess the courage to change themselves and their circumstances, which may mean changing career fields and organizations if they discover they're at odds with the existing corporate culture.



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