

Introduction

SUZANNE CLARK, PRESIDENT of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, was interviewed in an April 14, 2020, segment on PBS's *NewsHour* titled "The New Challenges Businesses May Face in a World Changed by COVID-19." A month earlier, the country had ground to a halt economically so that people could stay safe at home. Speaking about how to get the economy back up and running again, Clark admitted, "There is no playbook to take off the shelf and execute." No kidding. The novel coronavirus has been a crisis like none other we have experienced.

There is, however, a playbook for leadership. Leading is less about what you are up against and more about what you bring to the table. While you can't prepare for every situation, you can prepare yourself to lead. That is what you will find in the pages ahead.

This book is for you if you want to:

- Learn leadership tips that you can apply immediately.
- Glean insights from research but don't have the time to read long theoretical books.
- Grab onto practical actions for getting better at difficult skills. Most people call them soft skills, but I don't. They are hard—just ask anyone who has ever had to address a personal hygiene issue with an employee, collaborate on a project with an undermining colleague, or manage a conflict between two angry coworkers who refuse to work together.

This book is also for you if you are:

- New to a leadership role.
- Aspiring to be in a leadership role.
- Experienced as a leader but are entering a new position. A new environment is an opportunity to reflect on where you are now compared with where you were in your past role as a leader.
- Ready to lead some days, but on other days, you reluctantly step to the front when at least some part of you would rather hold back. There is something here for the hesitant leader, too.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

While you certainly may read this book from cover to cover, it is meant to be more like a reference book. You can go to the topic you need today for a stand-alone, five-minute read containing tips, reflections, actions to take, and techniques for addressing whatever challenge you are facing in the moment.

This book consists of 11 chapters that focus on topics that leaders think about or need to address almost daily:

1. **Communication.** Not surprisingly, this is the biggest chapter. While just about anything could fall under this heading, here you will find help with getting your point across effectively in the unique situations that leaders face. Your communication is your superpower. The topics here guide you in becoming intentional and impactful.
2. **Inspiration.** Some days you just need a spark to keep yourself and others excited about growth and learning. Look here to find fuel for your vision of success and pearls of wisdom to guide you to it.

3. **Work Habits.** Our daily actions add up over time to make us effective—or not. Building habits that refuel you and direct your energy to the right effort will pay off and prevent burnout and becoming overwhelmed.
4. **Performance Evaluations.** Make them meaningful and worthwhile, not meaningless and a waste of time. Learn in this section about biases, ratings, and skills to turn this process into a motivator.
5. **Teaching and Facilitating.** As a leader, you must learn to stand up in front of people and get a point across, engaging others in the process. This doesn't come naturally to everyone. This chapter is full of tips and skill-building exercises that will make you a standout.
6. **Self-Awareness.** Know yourself. This is a key strength for leaders, but it takes time to reflect on your strengths, personality, fears, the way you think, and more. We can't be good at everything. First, we have to realize what we are and are not good at so that we can maximize our strengths and manage what may never be our strong suits. This chapter gives you many avenues for this exploration.
7. **Difficult Conversations and Coaching.** You may revisit this chapter more than once. Conflict and coaching conversations are never easy, nor should they be, but they can make a huge and positive impact when handled with skill. Look here for tips on sharing meaningful feedback, leading through the challenges of change, and effectively managing conflict.
8. **Diversity.** Diverse teams are strong teams when we appreciate people's differences and treat everyone with respect. This chapter highlights select diversities and provides lessons for recognizing biases, seeing people as unique individuals, and leading fairly and respectfully.
9. **Teamwork.** Teams are how we work. This chapter points out ways to make your teams work well together, no matter how they came together.

10. **Culture.** Culture rules, and leaders play a huge role in creating it. Culture can seem a little difficult to get your arms around. This chapter offers many ways that you can work toward creating a culture of retention and high morale.
11. **Push Yourself.** One of the few assumptions you can make is that there is always more to learn; never stop learning. We don't grow when we are comfortable. We grow when we are in that sweet spot of "I think I can. . . . I'm not 100 percent sure, but I believe I can do this." Go to this chapter for suggestions on broadening the scope of your leadership.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

Each chapter is broken down into sections that delve into specific topics. At the beginning of each chapter, you will find a brief self-assessment of the competencies covered in that chapter. Start here to determine which section will be most helpful for you. The scoring for each competency is as follows:

- 1—I am struggling with or not yet skilled at this.
- 2—I am starting to work on improving at this, but I need more skill building.
- 3—I am making some consistent progress in improving at this.
- 4—I am doing very well in this area.

No one needs to see this score but you—so be honest. Scoring a 1 or 2 indicates an area that likely needs your attention, and the self-assessment questions point you to sections that will be most helpful. A score of 3 indicates that you are doing well, and reading this section will support you in going from good to great. If you

rate yourself a 4, your strength gives you the opportunity to mentor others, and reading this section can help you dissect just how you can do that and be a more effective mentor.

To assess yourself from a different angle, each section begins with a question prompting you to explore how growth in that area could benefit you and connecting you to the information that you need today.

In each section, you can expect to find the following:

- Coaching tips to take action immediately. It is like a “coach in a book.”
- Reflection questions to make you think about and look at your situation from a fresh perspective.
- Ideas for sharing the content with your colleagues as part of a self-led leadership development session.
- Adaptable ideas for teaching, with content written in a way that spurs discussion and group work and can be expanded for assignments.

You will see some overlap among topics. Looking at a concept from different angles can aid learning.

What not to expect here: *The* one way to lead.

My intention in writing this book is that you sort that out for yourself. In my dad’s eulogy, my siblings and I quoted him as often saying, “If I were you . . .” While we realized that he may have been right more often than we would have liked to admit, we still learned by doing things our own way. Evolving into your best leader-self is like that, too. I hope the ideas in this book spur your thinking, push you to consider and reflect on a deeper level, and decide for yourself how you want to be remembered as a leader.

Got five minutes? Let’s get started!