



Leaders

By Warren G. Bennis
ISBN: 9780060559540

Introduction

In this groundbreaking study of corporate America's most critical issue -- leadership -- world-renowned leadership guru Warren Bennis and his co-author Burt Nanus seek to define the role of the new leader: "one who commits people to action, who converts followers into leaders, and who may convert leaders into agents of change."

In researching the working philosophies of today's leaders, Bennis and Nanus conducted a series of 90 interviews with CEOs and outstanding figures from the public sector. In the course of their dialogues, they asked their subjects just three questions: What are your strengths and weaknesses? Was there any particular experience or event in your life that influenced your management philosophy? What were the major decision points in your career and how do you feel about your choices now? The revealing answers to these questions enabled the authors to establish the four key principles every manager

should know: Attention Through Vision, Meaning Through Communication, Trust Through Positioning, and the Deployment of Self.

In this age of "process," with downsizing and restructuring affecting many workplaces, many companies have fallen prey to lack of communication and distrust, and vision and leadership are needed more than ever before. The wisdom and insight in *Leaders* addresses this need. *Leaders* is an indispensable source of guidance all readers will appreciate, whether they're running a small department or in charge of an entire corporation.

Discussion Questions

1. Bennis and Nanus write about the importance of effective communication when a leader calls for great change or sacrifice. In your experience, how does open communication play a part in leadership?
2. Innovation is often perceived (from within and without) as a threat to any organization. The authors suggest that "staying the course" is the answer. Does this reflect your own experience of either introducing or responding to innovation?
3. How does the story of the tightrope aerialist Karl Wallenda reinforce Bennis and Nanus's theory of the importance of deployment of self and positive self-regard? Did you find this argument compelling? Why or why not?
4. "We've conclude that great leaders are like the Zen archer who develops his skills to the point where the desire to hit the target becomes extinguished and man, arrow, and target become indivisible components of the same process." At your best moments, does everything come together in this kind of perfect synthesis? Is this the metaphor you would use to describe yourself as a leader?
5. Who are some of the great leaders you've known or read about? What are some of their special talents? As you read *Leaders*, did you find any habits or philosophies that resonated with your own experience of leadership?
6. Bennis and Nanus describe true leaders as having the ability of "enrolling people in their vision through their optimism." How does a leader's optimistic outlook affect the experience of those being led? How does it affect the leader's perception of his own efforts?
7. How does a great leader communicate his or her vision? In your experience as a leader, what were the most effective approaches you used to address your vision?
8. What do Bennis and Nanus mean when they talk about the social architecture of a corporation? Could you relate to one of the three styles more than another? Which one?
9. How does Frank Dale's experience taking over as the new publisher of the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* reflect the importance of a leader's gaining organizational trust? Does this incident call to mind any similar trust-building experiences you've had?
10. To what extent do you agree with Bennis and Nanus that "the great leader, like the great orchestra conductor, calls forth the best that is in the organization?"

About the authors

Warren Bennis is Professor and Founding Chairman of the Leadership Institute at the University of Southern California, and the author of over 30 books on leadership, including *On Becoming a Leader* and, most recently, *Geeks and Geezers*.

Bert Nanus is a renowned expert on leadership and the author of many books on the subject, including *Visionary Leadership*. Now Professor Emeritus of Management at the University of Southern California, he was also research director of the Leadership Institute.