

# CHAPTER 1

## *You Don't Get To Be A 12-Point Buck By Luck!*

*"The intention of this book is concentrated on providing a different path, with more passionate and subtle tones, for those managers who feel trapped within the box of uncomfortable conformity."*

*"The better you are, the luckier you get."*

We have a lot in common:

- We all have "bosses."
- We are, at various times, fascinated, frustrated, motivated and annoyed by their behavior, frequently all in the same day.
- We often use the term "my boss" at the beginning of a sentence to explain the unexplainable, to rationalize the irrational, or to evoke a measure of shared sympathy, consolation, or understanding from others having similar experiences with their own bosses.
- We continually talk about "what we would have done differently if we were the boss" (but are often secretly happy that we are not).

However, we also have in our mind the blurred image of a manager who suddenly sweeps onto the scene like a paragon of leadership, whose passion and inspiration make us jump out of bed each day, and even look forward to Monday morning.

The question for many of us is "How do we get to be one of those kind of leaders?"

## Born Followers?

Is it possible that only certain people are born to be leaders? Has destiny encrypted special leadership genes within the DNA of the chosen few, leaving too little left for everyone else?

While the concept is highly doubtful, people talk about “born leaders” all the time. It’s probably more of a rationalization expressed by people who are attracted to leaders, yet fear the notion and the responsibility of actually leading. After all, if the select few are born to be leaders, it’s easy for everyone else to think of themselves as “born followers,” or to simply rationalize that leading comes down to luck and that some people just have more of it than others.

However, in the process they forget one of life’s little maxims: “The better you are, the luckier you get.” Unfortunately, those who see themselves as chronically “unlucky” never seem to make the reverse connection.

The confusion may arise from the often observed paradox of leadership. Since most managers struggle at leading, and look bad in the process, an effective leader appears even more naturally suited for the role, perhaps even making it “look easy,” similar to an accomplished pianist or a master teacher. Yet, people seldom say that a person is a born pianist or born teacher. Why then a “born leader”?

Perhaps the more important question is that even if it were true that there are “born leaders,” why are too few of them apparently being born?

## The Metamorphic Leader?

Nor are leaders formulaically “made,” as if just anyone can be placed into a developmental machine or inserted into a business model, or sent to a training program and metamorphically emerge as an effective leader. As improbable as this is, corporations attempt to do it every day. People are appointed as managers and are expected to lead, as if it were as natural as breathing and just as easy. Most are good people and dedicated employees. However, until they are able to take the conscious steps necessary to seize the leadership initiative, the majority of managers end up being poor leaders no matter how big their office, how much they are paid, how much training they get, or even who they know.

Discouraged by their failure to develop leaders on their own, some corporations believe they can bypass the developmental process by attracting recent MBA graduates with even higher salaries, assuming that they have “mastered” the art of leading in graduate school. This incomprehensibility reminds me of one of my fraternity brothers who had a date that was a sure thing to result in his first sexual experience.

Like most college students at the time, he studied for the event by going to the library and reading up on the process. After memorizing the diagrammatic model of the female erogenous zones, and the nine steps to effective love making, he was ready. However, at the moment of truth, he discovered to his dismay that his date did not have the programmatic lines and identifying numbers on her body parts that he had memorized. He became quickly confused, could not adapt, failed to execute, and as a result did not get "lucky"!

The lesson is obvious. "Real life" is typically far more complicated and far less forgiving than the canned "case study" world of the classroom, but far more relevant and longer lasting. People get hurt, fortunes are lost, lives are changed, and careers are destroyed every day by managers who fail to lead. Sadly, few regrets are ever expressed, most likely because bad managers are either too oblivious to recognize their inadequacies, too self-absorbed to realize their missteps, or just in denial of their responsibility for their failures.

### *The 12-Point Buck*

Here's another valuable lesson that I will never forget. I learned it when dropping my son off at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, a beautiful school offering a degree in Hotel Management despite being located in a city offering too few hotels to accommodate visiting parents.

Unable to get a room close to campus, I was finally able to get a reservation in a bed and breakfast hunting lodge, ten miles out of town and well off the beaten path. It was not a great place, but it was owned by a woman whose understanding exceeded her appearance. As she was making breakfast, she mentioned that a party of hunters would be checking in later in the day. I wondered why they were attracted to her property. She told me that her land was quite large and that there was a 12-point buck "out back" that was the real attraction. When I asked if she was concerned that a hunter would shoot the meal ticket animal, her reply was unforgettable. "Honey," she laughed, "you don't get to be a 12-point buck by luck!"

## **People Want To Be Led, Not Managed**

And, that, of course, is the point. Leaders are not born, nor are they programmatically engineered, nor academically produced from MBA programs. All the wishing and hoping and planning and scheming in the world will not produce a leader. Effective leaders are people who have the ability to merge their talent, vision, ambition, and passion to successfully guide their teams (and themselves) within the framework of their organization's strategy and to fulfill the objectives of their mission.

They also understand a few key principles regarding their followers:

- They do not purposely intend to do a bad job.
- They do want to be acknowledged for doing a good job.
- They would prefer to like, even admire, their bosses—but trust is a more important attribute.
- They want a personal connection to their leaders.
- They want to be inspired, not intimidated.
- They perform better when they understand where they are going, and how they will get there.
- They feel more secure when they are led, not managed.

Therefore, there is obviously much more to leading than being born into it, reading about it, or even talking about it. If only it were that easy. Frankly, when it comes to leaders we need more visionaries with optimistically broader views, and fewer MBAs with skeptically narrower perspectives. We also need fewer books from military and sports celebrities suggesting that their heroic experiences are similar to those being experienced to everyone else.

My personal experience has also shown that there is no formula for the development of an effective leadership style. Each leader's style is unique and reflects the manner and passion through which they reapply the lessons of their learning, and pass on the knowledge from their experiences that cause real people to change their behavior in the real world and under real conditions to achieve their real objectives.

In short, leading is an individualized journey, the best part of which is that all leaders are works in progress because they are continually evolving and (re)learning how to lead.

### *The Feel*

Think about it in this context. Great chefs do not blindly and obediently follow the directions of another restaurant's recipes. They create different specialties for those who are willing, if not eager, to pay for a unique dining experience prepared from someone "lucky" enough to have been "born" with a gift for cooking (even if only acquired after years of training). Through their experiences the best chefs develop "the Feel" for their ingredients, and of their art, which gives them the confidence to become more creative and more successful.

The same is true for all effective leaders. Managers become leaders only after they develop "the Feel" for the attributes of leading which inspire the confidence and trust that their people willingly and enthusiastically follow. Development of "the Feel" begins when a manager becomes comfortable with the image they see in their mirror each morning. It happens when they

gain a holistic understanding of their people, their organization, and the universe in which they compete. And it all comes together when they master the ability to skillfully orchestrate the multitude of roles and relationships within their areas of responsibility.

Managers begin to become leaders when they think about what it means to be a leader; when they are able to visualize the act of their leading; when they can understand and relate the essence of their leadership; and when they can communicate their vision to their followers in clear and comprehensible terms. They become leaders when they learn to metaphorically translate everyday images, however unconventional, into a broader perspective to which their followers can relate, and upon which they can act.

Once they gain the skills and confidence to behave like a leader, they begin to hear how they have an “inherent” ability (e.g., “the gift”) to motivate and energize others to follow. But, it all begins with “the Feel,” which provides the confidence that enables a manager to ascend to the loftier position of mentor-leader.

The key question, then, is “How do I get there?” The simple answer is that it is not a simple process. While you'll believe it when you feel it, if you haven't felt it yet—keep trying. A twelve point buck, even a metaphorical one, doesn't become a twelve pointer overnight, but it definitely has little to do with luck.

## The Leadership Challenge

This brings us to the goals of the book—to challenge your thinking and to help you ascend from being a manager to a more self-fulfilled leader by:

- broadening your attitude about managing
- raising your awareness about leading
- providing the tools to help you make it happen.

Numerous stories and analogies will be presented as philosophical and conceptual learning (and “unlearning”) tools to help managers make the transition to mentor-leader. These are leaders who are not only innately “different,” but whose advice and counsel make the discernable difference in helping others to discover and expand their unique gifts while developing their own leadership points.

### *Bold Colors and Subtle Tones*

When I was in Charleston, SC a few years ago, I couldn't help but notice the large number of art galleries in the city. The majority of the paintings for sale were “street scenes” of homes and buildings in the historical area. While most

of the artists' works were excellent, I kept coming back to one studio that appealed to me as having the best work. In fact, there were so many first place ribbons hanging from the ceiling moldings that they grossly reduced the amount of precious wall space to display the artist's watercolors.

When I met the artist, I was surprised to find an old woman, feeble from ongoing cancer treatment (which had claimed her hair, but did not stop her from smoking). Nevertheless, as frail as she was, her handshake was as strong as an ironworker's, and her blue eyes riveted right into mine.

She told me that I had purchased her best known piece of art. The painting was a Charleston doorway and street scene that any artist could have painted, and probably had. I asked her why this rather common appearing piece of work had been such a big seller, and why she had won virtually every art competition in South Carolina for the past 25 years. Her response was quite memorable.

She said that she began her work by painting all the bold colors first, "Because that's what everyone can see." Over the next week or two, at various times of day and night, she would revisit the scene to observe the lighting, the shadows, the noise, the activity, and the personality of the place she was memorializing.

The final act was brushing in the subtle tones which only she had experienced. While she painted all the bold colors at the scene, the subtle tones were painted in her studio, with only the impressions from her stored senses to guide her hand. These strokes expressed her unique perspective of the scene and "her passion" for what she had seen and felt, making it richer, deeper, and different from the work of other artists.

As she described her process, I immediately knew that she was describing what made a leader different from a manager. Managers can typically deal with what is directly in front of them and equally obvious to everyone else. However, leaders work harder to find the subtle ways that passionately express what they uniquely see and feel. Even when others have access to the same resources or share the same objectives, leaders find a way to be different.

The message is clear. Whether you're selling a painting or leading an organization, your "customers" can see—and value—the difference—when you have the passion and persistence to dare to be different.

This book, therefore, does not intend to present a balanced comparison between managing and leading. There are already numerous books that define these concepts and discuss the difference between managing process and leading people; or "doing things right" vs. "doing the right thing." They describe what "everyone sees," so there is little need to further explore these basic comparisons here.

Instead, the objective of this book is concentrated on providing a different path, with more passionate and subtle tones, for those managers who

feel trapped within the box of uncomfortable conformity. It is for those managers who want to escape from an environment of reacting to what everyone else sees and does, and desire to be personally empowered to pursue what they uniquely feel. This book is for managers who need to be liberated to explore their emerging skills and to challenge their personal limits.

Most importantly, it is for those who aspire to achieve and to ascend to the more personally satisfying role of a leader.

While everyone who dares to embark on this self-fulfilling quest will not reach the full twelve points, what's to lose by taking the risk? Frankly, there's more to lose by standing on life's sidelines. Most employees will only get a warm handshake and a certificate of attendance from their boss as they walk out the door for the final time—unless they take control and make a conscious move to change their fate.

Therefore, if taking orders and marching in step are all you demand in exchange for your lifetime of work and effort, you will not need this book to achieve success. Just keep your head down and your mouth closed.

However, in the sport of business, as long as you are being paid for what you produce, you are in the game. Therefore, don't wait for an invitation to play because you are already on the field, and the game is underway.

But, be forewarned, this book is definitely not a "textbook." Leadership is not learned from a book or artfully practiced because you have attended a course or have earned a degree. Instead, it is about your gaining the skill and confidence to dare to be different. The metaphors, parables, humor, and occasional irreverence provide the relational framework and the subtle tones that you will need to think differently and make the transition from manager to leader.

While many, perhaps even most, of the stories will be memorable and provide the reader with the inspiration to lead, the perspiration part of the equation is all yours.

*You must make it happen for you!*

Development of a full rack of antlers begins one point at a time. If you're ready to go down a different path, and to test your personal limits, follow me.

We have a lot in common. *This book is about us.*

