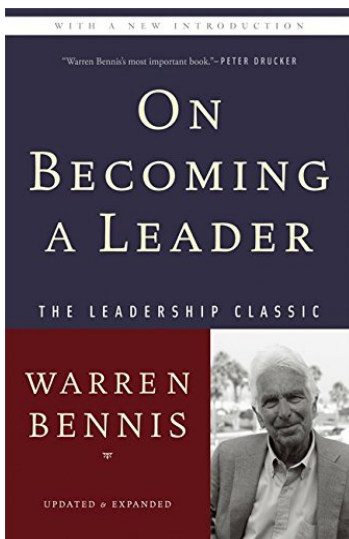


EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARIES

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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On Becoming A Leader

THE NUTSHELL

All leaders, although different in many ways, share some basic ingredients. There are five key qualities that every leader must have: The first basic ingredient of leadership is a guiding vision—the leader has a clear idea of what he wants to do, and the strength to persist in the face of obstacles. They know what they want to do and have the strength to withstand opposition and failure. Second is passion, enabling them to stick it out for the long haul. Third, a leader loves what they do, enabling them to give hope and inspiration to others.

The next ingredient is integrity, which has three parts: self-knowledge, candor, and maturity. You cannot succeed if you don't know yourself, your strengths and weaknesses, what you want and why you want it, etc. Candor is the key to knowledge—an honesty of thought & action, combined with a steadfast devotion to principle. Maturity comes with experience and following others, and brings the ability to lead other people into what they have learned.

Finally, leaders must be people of curiosity and daring. Leaders wonder about everything, and aren't afraid to take a risk and try new things, knowing that even if they fail they will learn from it.

People start to become leaders at the moment they decide for themselves how to be. That isn't easy, but is necessary. Knowing yourself means making a distinction between who others think you are and who you want to be. It is a lifetime process, not an event, and no one can teach you how to do it.

No one can teach you how to become you. But there are some useful patterns that seem consistent over different people's experiences. The first is that you are

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your own best teacher. Leaders saw a gap—they knew they had to learn and grow, or admit that they had settled for less than they were capable of. That leads naturally to the second pattern—taking responsibility for that learning—and for yourself—rather than waiting for someone to provide it for you.

Pattern three: you can learn anything you want to learn, which means embracing new experiences, and diving into the unknown, to embrace it, absorb it, and then understand it. The final lesson is that true understanding comes from reflecting on your experience. “Nothing is truly yours until you understand it—not even yourself.” Reflection leads to understanding.

Besides knowing themselves, leaders need to know the world they live in. Leaders are those who learn from every life experience. They are continually developing themselves by reading and reflecting on life experience.

Leadership is first being, then doing, so “Letting the Self emerge” is the essential task for leaders. It is how one takes the step from being to doing, and taking that step in a way that is more about expressing who you are than proving something to someone. There is a natural progression of expression that ultimately results in someone becoming a leader.

The first step in the progression is to learn from the past, and reflecting on it is the most pivotal way we learn. Reflection can be hard work, which is why so few do it. Looking back, thinking back, viewing an experience from different perspectives, talking it out, etc. are all ways that we reflect—ways we make learning conscious. Through reflecting, we start to understand the meaning of the past, and the course of action we need to take as a result. In other words, we find a resolution—an understanding of what has happened, and what we should do because of it. Once you have learned to reflect on your experiences and found a resolution, you begin to develop your own perspective.

Perspective is simply how you see things—your frame of reference or your point of view. It is knowing what you think and what you want, what you believe and where you want to go. All leaders have a perspective, and it is their own, not one borrowed from someone else. Anyone who really wants to express themselves must have a point of view—an opinion, a way of seeing things. Too many people today don’t have that—they often want to become “leaders” because they want position or power, but without a perspective, the truth is they don’t actually lead—because they aren’t going anywhere.

Learning to lead is, on one level, learning to manage change. Whether it is setting direction, establishing a philosophy, or creating a culture, change is part of the process, and effective leaders learn how to manage change and adapt to it. Simple to say but challenging to do!

Leaders grow by leading, especially when facing obstacles. There is no substitute for experience. As weather shapes, mountains, so problems shape leaders. Difficult bosses, lack of vision and/or virtue in the executive suite, circumstances beyond their control, and their own mistakes are the leader’s basic curriculum.

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As we look to the future, a future filled with change and ambiguity, what are the factors individuals and organizations need to exhibit in order to cope with change and create a new future? There are ten:

1. **Leaders manage the dream:** Every leader must create a compelling vision, and then translate that dream into reality.
2. **Leaders embrace error:** they created an atmosphere where risk-taking is encouraged, they aren't afraid to make mistakes, and they admit them when they do.
3. **Leaders encourage reflective backtalk:** they know the importance of having people around them who will tell them the unvarnished truth.
4. **Leaders encourage dissent:** they welcome contrary views.
5. **Leaders possess optimism, faith, and hope:** these qualities are contagious and lift organizations to new heights.
6. **Leaders understand the Pygmalion effect:** People will live up to (or down to) what is expected of them.
7. **Leaders have the "Gretzky factor."** Hockey great Wayne Gretzky said "It's not as important to know where the puck is as to know where it will be." Leaders have a sense of where the organization needs to go if it is to grow.
8. **Leaders see the long view;** they aren't controlled by short-term thinking.
9. **Leaders understand stakeholder symmetry:** they know they need to balance the interests of all the different groups with a stake in the organization.
10. **Leaders create strategic alliances:** they don't feel the need to do everything; rather they create partnerships with others who can get things done.

That's how the leaders and organizations of the future will thrive. As they express themselves, they will make new movies, new products, and maybe a new world.