

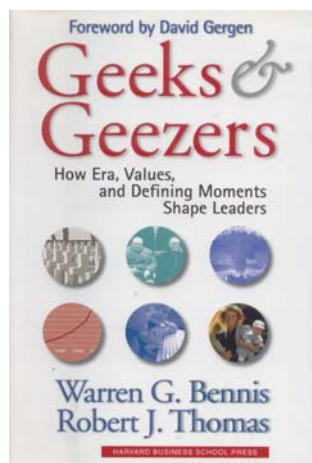
## Reviews of Books on Leadership

In his introduction to *Leadership: Classical, Contemporary and Critical Approaches* (Oxford University Press, 1997), Keith Grint notes the irony that so many leaders appear to have led very well without ever reading a book on leadership (p2). If they choose to break the habit of a lifetime and start reading, what books might they find helpful? Here are some practical suggestions. For those interested in an academic approach, Peter Northouse's *Leadership: Theory and Practice* (Sage, 3rd edn, 2004) provides a standard introduction.

The books are:

- **Geeks and Geezers** by Warren Bennis & Robert J Thomas
- **Good to Great** by Jim Collins
- **Leadership: Limits and Possibilities** by Keith Grint
- **Leadership and the New Science** by Margaret J Wheatley
- **Leading Quietly** by Joseph L Badaracco
- **Living Leadership** by George Binney et al
- **The New Leaders** (aka Primal Leadership) by Daniel Goleman et al

### Warren G Bennis & Robert J Thomas, *Geeks and Geezers*, Harvard Business School Press (2002)



Warren Bennis is a respected author on leadership. As co-author of the intriguingly entitled *Geeks and Geezers*, he has investigated similarities and differences between successful leaders from different generations (geeks are under the age of 35 while geezers are over 70). In the words of the book's subtitle, Bennis and Thomas investigate How Era, Values and Defining Moments Shape Leaders. Their research revealed some key differences across the generations. For example, while geezers can list heroic figures who inspire them, geeks struggle with this concept and prefer to speak of family members.

But perhaps the most interesting point to emerge is something that transcends different eras. The authors note how all the leaders had been through a profound experience through which they emerged with a capacity to adapt and seek meaning. For many of the geezers, these relate to wartime, while for one of the geeks a realisation at the age of eight of the link between using paper plates and deforestation led to the founding of a non-profit organisation which has planted more than a million trees. The authors apply the term 'crucible' to these defining moments, where era (characterized by changes such as the end of the Cold War or the rise of the Internet) and individual factors (the experiences and learning we bring to our encounters with the world) feed into the maelstrom, producing individuals with voice and integrity.

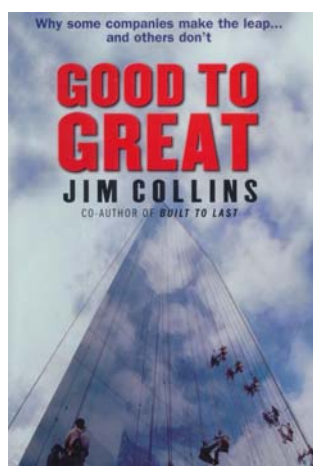
Era, values and personal characteristics are melted together in the crucible. And, contrary to the vast majority of self-improvement aids which flood the marketplace, the crucible tends to originate outside ourselves.

Bennis and Thomas summarised their book in the *Harvard Business Review* article *Crucibles of Leadership* (September 2002, reprint R0209B).

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## Jim Collins, *Good to Great*, Random House (2001)



In *Built to Last* (Century Business, 1994), Jim Collins and Jerry Porras studied enduring companies (those with at least a 50 year track record). Their conclusions included some surprises: charismatic leaders did not always feature, nor did all companies start with a clear vision, though a compelling vision, big goals and vivid pictures were soon needed. In this later study, Collins applies a similar research methodology to leaders. He produced some unexpected findings.

In a chapter headed 'First Who... Then What', Collins uses the analogy of a bus. Contrary to the researchers' expectation of finding leaders with a clear direction, Good to Great leaders 'first got the right people on the bus (and the wrong people off the bus) and then figured out where to drive it' (p41, italics orig.). Collins makes telling observations about the importance of adaptability, motivation and mutual support in the context of leadership.

But the most significant finding hides behind the not-very-inspiring description of Level 5 Leadership. In contrast to the headline-hitting celebrity CEO, the Level 5 executive 'builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will' (p20). As Collins records, 'We were not looking for Level 5 leadership in our research, or anything like it, but the data was overwhelming and convincing. It is an empirical, not an ideological, finding' (p40).

## Keith Grint, *Leadership: Limits and Possibilities*, Palgrave Macmillan (2005)

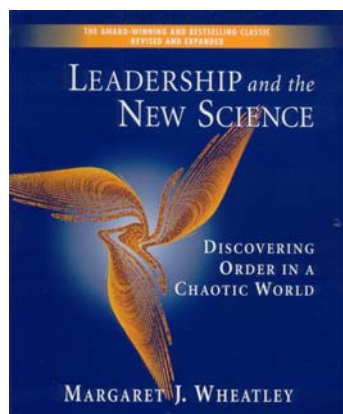


Keith Grint is Professor of Leadership Studies at the UK's Defence College: his book includes observations from RAF training courses. For those, like me, with a stereotyped view of the armed services, he has some surprising insights. Two ideas, in particular, contribute to the debate about leadership and corporate culture.

First, constructive dissent. Grint recalls how Admiral Sir Cloudisley Shovel in 1707 allegedly hanged a sailor who suggested the fleet was heading for some rocks... on which the fleet then foundered with the loss of hundreds of lives. He also introduces us to its mirror image, destructive consent, for which Marks and Spencer in the late 1990s provides a good example (well described, together with the subsequent corporate recovery in Judi Bevan's *Rise and Fall of Marks and Spencer... And How It Rose Again* (Profile Books, 2007)). Constructive dissenters do not have a history of welcome. From the mighty biblical prophets, through Henry II's troublesome Thomas à Becket, to today's uncomfortable prophets (Bono and Geldof?), we prefer to assimilate or ignore their distinctive contribution.

Secondly, inverse learning. Grint notes how groups learn. Using the example of parents learning from their children, he notes how the follower can be teacher to the leader (p105f). IDEO's Tom Kelley describes a similar application, reverse mentoring, in his *Ten Faces of Innovation* (Profile Books, 2006, pp85-87).

**Margaret J Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science*, Berrett Koehler (1999)**

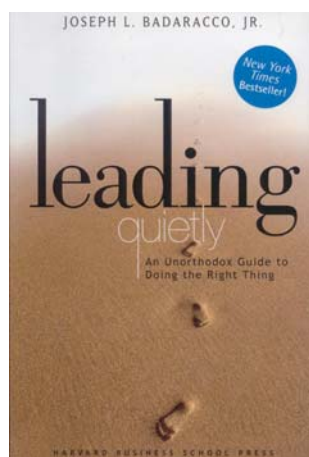


A profound new approach has excited many people (including me) in recent years. 'Discovering Order in a Chaotic World' is the subtitle of Margaret (Meg) Wheatley's book. It reflects a worldview variously described by complexity science or chaos theory. Originally published in 1992, it offers some far-reaching insights.

For those used to a Newtonian view of management – apply certain inputs here, go through prescribed processes, and recognisable results will appear there – this book offers a profoundly different view. We are introduced to self-organizing systems and strange attractors. We learn how 'chaos is necessary to new creative ordering' (p13). Organic and relational metaphors abound. Towards the end of the book, Wheatley offers some 'new metaphors to describe leaders: gardeners, midwives, stewards, servants, missionaries, facilitators, convenors' (p165).

In her more recent writings, Wheatley has expanded her perspective to embrace the arts and poetry. She describes the true professional as 'one who does not obscure grace with illusions of technical prowess' (*Finding Our Way: Leadership for an Uncertain Time*, Berrett-Koehler, 2005, p137).

**Joseph L Badaracco Jr, *Leading Quietly*, Harvard Business School Press (2002)**



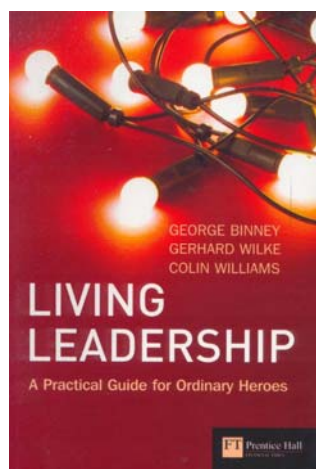
'Defining moments' was the title of an earlier book by Joe Badaracco, an authority on business ethics (Harvard Business School Press, 1997). In it, he described occasions when managers must choose between right and right. Badaracco explored how such moments reveal values, test commitment and shape the future - at both personal and organisational levels. Described as 'An Unorthodox Guide to Doing the Right Thing', *Leading Quietly* once again emphasises the importance of small events, of messy everyday challenges dealt with by the people working away from the limelight. 'There are no little things' (p9).

Badaracco describes how his thoughts on quiet leadership have their roots in a MBA course he taught where students discussed works of literature. From *Macbeth* to *Death of a Salesman*, two patterns caught his attention. First, characters who set out to be great often end up disappointed or bitter; secondly, unassuming minor characters make a careful and sensitive contribution. Not that Badaracco is against heroes. He refers to Albert Schweitzer and relates how James Burke of Johnson and Johnson responded to the contamination of Tylenol capsules in the early 1980s. It is hardly a coincidence that J&J is one of the companies featured in Collins and Porras' influential study of enduring companies, *Built to Last* (Century Business, 1994).

For those who like simple slogans, Badaracco makes uncomfortable reading: chapter titles include 'Trust Mixed Motives' and 'Bend the Rules'. He concludes with three 'all too ordinary' quiet virtues: restraint, modesty and tenacity (pp170ff).

Badaracco summarised his book in the *Harvard Business Review* article *We Don't Need Another Hero* (September 2001, reprint R0108H).

**George Binney, Gerhard Wilke & Colin Williams, *Living Leadership*, FT Prentice Hall (2005)**

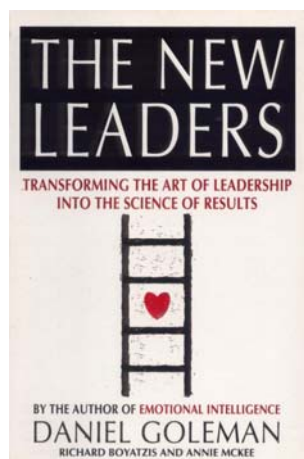


Incorporating the results of an Ashridge research programme, this 'Practical Guide for Ordinary Heroes' presents evidence from a post-heroic world - one index entry reads 'Superman, end of'. Although Binney and his fellow authors do not use the term, this is a book for those advocating distributed (or dispersed) leadership, a concept promoted by Joseph Raelin in his inelegantly titled *Creating Leaderful Organizations* (Berret-Koehler, 2003).

The importance of managing 'throughout' was highlighted by Jonathan Gosling and Henry Mintzberg in a *Harvard Business Review* article in the context of being collaborative. 'To be in a collaborative mind-set means to be inside, involved, to manage *throughout*. But it has a more profound meaning, too - to get management beyond managers, to distribute it so that responsibility flows naturally to whoever can take the initiative and pull things together' (*The Five Minds of a Manager*, November 2003, pp54-63, p.60 (italics orig.)). This article also speaks of the worldly mindset: managers should be found at the interfaces, or edges.

The authors emphasise the importance of our interdependency. They end their book with a reflection on living with permanent transition, providing a delightful challenge to the rigours of scientific observation and reductionism with a series characterised by 'We notice... Our hunch is...':

**Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee, *The New Leaders*, Little, Brown (2002)**



Emotional intelligence was a big theme of the 1990s. Its populariser, Daniel Goleman, joined with two co-authors in a book published in the US as *Primal Leadership*. But this title appears to have been too strong for the British market. Subtitled 'Transforming the Art of Leadership into the Science of Results', Goleman develops his earlier work, eg reducing emotional intelligence's key competences from five to four: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management (pp253-6).

The authors begin by describing how great leaders move us, using 'primal' in two senses: as initiating and as most important. They contrast resonant leaders, who can empathise and read emotions, with dissonant ones, who find it difficult to empathise and who read emotions poorly. The book's central section examines the motivation to change and how to sustain leadership change. For the latter, the authors choose the term 'metamorphosis'. Others, such as Joseph Jaworski, use *metanoia*, a term which refers to 'a fundamental shift of mind' (*Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership*, Berret-Koehler, 1998, p94).

New Leaders, we read, make five discoveries, beginning with the Ideal Self, 'where change begins', and ending with the Power of Relationships. I would welcome a book - perhaps from an indigenous peoples' or Eastern perspective - which inverts this Western flow. For example, Satish Kumar uses the Sanskrit dictum, *so hum*, to emphasise our dependence on each other: *You Are Therefore I Am* (Green Books, 2002).