

JAMES M. KOUZES  
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BESTSELLING AUTHORS OF *THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE*

# Everyday People, Extraordinary Leadership

How to  
**Make a Difference**  
Regardless of Your  
Title, Role, or Authority



“Want to know how to motivate your people? Read *Everyday People, Extraordinary Leadership*. It will demonstrate that getting people to follow your lead is not like throwing a switch. You need to reach their hearts and their minds. Words are important, but more important are your actions. Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner are two of the best thinkers (and doers) in the leadership arena. Seldom have I walked into the office without seeing a copy of one of their leadership books. The young women and men who first read Jim and Barry’s books are now leading their organizations. So, it is fitting that *Everyday People, Extraordinary Leadership* comes out now. Our times are challenging and leadership is more important than ever. Read this book and come away with ideas that will invigorate your leadership and inspire others to follow your lead.”

—**John Baldoni**, member of Marshall Goldsmith 100 Coaches, Global Guru  
Top 30 Leadership expert, and author of 14 books, including his newest  
*GRACE: A Leader’s Guide to a Better Us*

“Uplifting, insightful, practical, and powerful! The stories and examples packed into this book clarify what leadership means, why it matters, and how everyone can (and should!) lead. Thank you, Jim and Barry, for this valuable gem!”

—**Deb Calvert**, president of People First Productivity Solutions, coauthor,  
*Stop Selling and Start Leading*

“In my first foray into *The Leadership Challenge* world of Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner, I was presented with the idea that “The road to the future is unpaved.” This latest addition to their incredible literary toolbox provides the reader with a clear path to that future, one that clearly defines both the scenic route and potential roadblocks. It is current, timely, and instructive, and emphasizes above all that leadership truly is everyone’s business.”

—**Alan Lyme**, LISW, Certified Master for The Leadership Challenge, MINT  
Certified MI Trainer

“The world needs strong leadership today more than ever before and Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner show us the difference extraordinary leaders are making with their teams, organizations, and communities. In their newest book, *Everyday People, Extraordinary Leadership*, Jim and Barry do a masterful job of providing us with wonderful leadership stories and lessons learned from everyday people centered around The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership. This is a must-read book for any leader who is looking to make a positive impact with those they serve.”

—**Brent Kondritz**, Executive Director, Center for Leadership,  
University of Dayton

“Local communities are facing unique challenges: social unrest, catastrophic weather events, and a need for truth and understanding. As a local news organization, Scripps has challenged ourselves to create an authentic connection with our viewers through essential journalism and meaningful storytelling. *The Leadership Challenge* provided the framework for our company to hold the discussions that help us manage change. Now, Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner take that to the next level, recognizing there are leaders at all levels and no one needs a title to be a leader.”

—**Brian Lawlor**, President, Local Media, The E.W. Scripps Company

“At a time when impact and influence is needed most, Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner provide us with a roadmap for each of us to be our very best. I am thrilled about this latest book, *Everyday People, Extraordinary Leadership*. We know leadership is NOT a title; it’s all about behavior influencing and empowering others. In my business, the true 1:1 leadership occurs between every nurse and patient wherever care is delivered. Jim and Barry teach us from over 30 years of research a practical yet profound way to get up every day, show up every day, wherever that is, to make a difference in this world through our words, actions, and behaviors toward those around us.”

—**Lori Armstrong**, CEO & Chief Clinical Officer, Inspire Nurse Leaders, and Adjunct Professor, Drexel University

“Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner have consistently helped millions of people across the globe every day as they grow and lead. Their latest book, *Everyday People, Exemplary Leadership* takes their seminal work to the next level, providing data based, yet very practical guidance based on their decades of experience and research. Whether you are just starting your career, or are a seasoned exec, you will learn the core tenets of exemplary leadership that really do apply to everybody! Read this book—you will grow.”

—**Ann Herrmann-Nehdi**, Chair of the Board, Herrmann Inc.

“Now more than ever (a phrase we’re hearing a lot these days), leadership is important. And while that’s true, the reality is that it’s always been true. Kouzes and Posner’s wonderful new book illuminates a subject that is both timeless and timely. Its principles are not defined by a particular era; yet, they are

hyper-relevant to today's unique challenges and crises. This is a book for leaders. And guess what? That includes you, because whether you know it or not, and regardless of your position or title, you are already leading. This book will help you to do it with conscious intent, and, therefore, to do it better. And that's exactly what we all need—now more than ever.”

—**Steve Farber**, Founder, The Extreme Leadership Institute, author, *The Radical Leap*, *Greater Than Yourself*, and *Love Is Just Damn Good Business*

“Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner have done it again! Their new book *Everyday People, Extraordinary Leadership* expands on the excellent foundation of their earlier book, *The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership*. They bring not only empirical research but also real life examples of leadership qualities and practices that everyday people use to make the extraordinary happen.”

—**Louise Aryapour**, CFO, Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County

“Growing up in the late 1960's and 70's, I was driven to read all I could about leadership, set goals, observe others, and make lists of traits that good leaders displayed. I read many, many books to learn those action steps. I would challenge myself, engage others for support, and practice deliberately. My obsession with continuous learning and training made all the difference. I wish I would have had this book back then. This book really simplifies the process, which took me over 10 years to finally feel confident in my ability to lead. I could have had that 'roadmap' in just one book. I congratulate James and Barry on another great leadership book.”

—**Dwight Conover**, Chairman, Northwest Financial Corporation

“Kouzes and Posner have done it again! Reminding us that no matter our role, *everyone* has the capacity for significant leadership impact in their lives, workplaces, and communities. Their research confirms that it is not personality or charisma that produces leaders, but a specific set of measurable and replicable behaviors. And then they provide exercises we can *all* undertake to strengthen those very same competencies. A practical and inspiring guidebook to leadership for all!”

—**Darrell Evora**, CEO, Uplift Family Services

*“Everyday People, Extraordinary Leadership* perfectly illustrates Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner’s idea that “leadership is everyone’s business. It is a simple, yet profound leadership model for everyone regardless of your title, position, or authority.

To demonstrate this point, let me show you the difference between the old train (what we called green train) in the past and the bullet train which runs throughout China now. The old train has one engine in the front of the train and it drags all the cars. That’s why the speed is very slow.

However, with the bullet train, each car has its own engine and the cars work together collectively. Thus, the bullet train is super fast. As a parallel to organizational leadership, if it is only one leader that takes the leading role, it is harder for him or her to lead. However, if everyone is ignited, enabled, and empowered, the ordinary people can make the extraordinary difference, they can start their own engines, and take personal responsibilities. The impact will be huge—everyone will feel responsible and engaged, team morale will be boosted, and the company’s financial performance will improve.

With the deliberate practice according to the leadership model, anyone can become an extraordinary leader and make the difference anytime and anywhere they want.

—**Connie Stevens**, Founder, HeadStart Consulting Company (Shanghai)

*“With *Everyday People, Extraordinary Leadership*, Barry Posner and James Kouzes have presented a new vision of leadership. Not limited to the nominal leaders or specific groups of managers but for all of us. The book guides us through five practices of leadership everyone can learn and use at work, school, or everyday life. All practices are proven by carefully collected data and memorable examples.*

For me as someone who mainly works with virtual teams and who has to lead people who are not directly reporting to me or even are on a higher management level, the five practices of extraordinary leadership provide easy-to-apply methods for successful collaboration with my team members. Thank you.”

—**Alex Schiller**, Senior Global Account Manager Automotive, Micron Technology

**Everyday  
People,  
Extraordinary  
Leadership**





JAMES M. KOUZES  
BARRY Z. POSNER

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How to  
**Make a Difference**  
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Title, Role, or Authority

The **Leadership**  
**Challenge**<sup>®</sup>  
A Wiley Brand 

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# PREFACE

## The Premise and the Promise

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The premise of *Everyday People, Extraordinary Leadership: How to Make a Difference Regardless of Your Title, Role, or Authority* is quite simple: leadership is a learnable set of actions and behaviors that is available to everyone. In the pages that follow, we make the case that leadership is not about rank, position, or authority, and we will provide data to support this claim. We'll also share examples of individuals who, as a result of engaging in practices of exemplary leadership, have guided others in making extraordinary things happen in their organizations and communities.

*Everyday People, Extraordinary Leadership* is about what *individuals* do to effect change and improvement. It is about the behaviors and actions individuals use to transform values into actions, visions into realities, obstacles into innovations, division into unity, and risks into rewards. It's about exercising leadership that contributes to creating an

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environment in which people can work together to turn perplexing problems and challenging opportunities into remarkable successes.

All too often, when leadership is discussed within workplaces and communities, attention is given primarily to those appointed or elected to positions of authority. While leaders with titles certainly deserve credit for what they do, they are not the only people who matter. In fact, we would argue that there are just as many, probably even more, leaders without titles who contribute to collective achievements and well-being. Workplace and community engagement are not just a function of what formal leaders do; they are also related to how *all* leaders in organizations behave.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a case in point as it spread across the globe, overwhelming healthcare systems, shutting down a significant number of commerce and educational systems, and totally disrupting the normal way of life for effectively every person on the planet. It has been an unprecedented crisis like no other experienced in our lifetime. While there are—and have to be—global, national, regional, state, and local coordinated efforts to address the pandemic, it is also the many small acts of leadership among doctors, nurses, first responders, teachers, parents, students, volunteers, and other concerned citizens that make a difference. They create novel ways to treat the sick, care for the vulnerable, deal with shortages, produce personal protective equipment, recognize heroes, and even bring a bit of joy to an otherwise tragic and depressing situation.

Another case in point about how tragedy and adversity create opportunities for people to step up and lead, and that leadership arises as much, if not more so, from the bottom up as it does from the top down, is the response to the death of George Floyd while in police custody. His death was the tipping point in long-standing tensions around matters of racial and social justice and police treatment of people of color. Within a day of the event, protests began, first in Minneapolis, where the incident occurred, and then across the United States and in major cities around the world. These were mostly decentralized actions initiated largely by young people of highly diverse backgrounds who had no formal titles or positions. They captured the attention of governments, businesses, and



ordinary citizens and supercharged calls for more diversity, equity, and inclusion in every institution.

There continues to be no shortage of challenges facing individuals, organizations, and communities, and no limits to the opportunities and needs for people to lead. We wrote this book to help you prepare to become the best leader you can be and take advantage of the chances you have to make this world a little bit better place than you find it.

## Who Should Read This Book?

This book is for and about people who do not have titles, like supervisor, manager, executive, chief, head, director, captain, boss, and the like, or some formal authority over other people. It's intended for front-line workers, new hires, individual contributors, salespeople, analysts, researchers, consultants, professionals, community activists, volunteers, project leads, scientists, engineers, administrators, artists, athletes, attorneys, programmers, coaches, teachers, parents, and all the others who lead without the benefit of hierarchical position or rank. The book aims to help people—no matter their role—strengthen their capacity to make extraordinary things happen.

We also wrote this book to uplift your spirits. We will show you how you can be effective at leading without any formal authority. Leadership matters from wherever you do it. We have learned from our research—which is discussed in each chapter—that people who aren't managers or executives are far more capable of developing themselves as leaders and exercising leadership than tradition or myth has ever assumed possible.

Managers, executives, and leadership developers will benefit, as well, from reading this book. They will find here example after example of people who have made extraordinary things happen without having the advantage of title or positional power. We hope that it will reinforce the need for them to provide leadership development opportunities to *everyone* in their organization—and much sooner in people's careers than they typically do. We know that the best leaders are the best learners,

and learning leadership is best begun *before* people join the workforce or take on formal or official organizational responsibilities.

As you will see from the scores of examples in this book, the principles apply regardless of the nature of your organization, and they are not dependent upon any particular demographic characteristic (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, function, nationality, etc.) or personality variable. The focus is on the behaviors and actions of what people do when they are exercising exemplary leadership.

## Research-Based Practices

The principles and practices described in *Everyday People, Extraordinary Leadership* are based solidly on quantitative and qualitative research. The book has its origins in a study we began in 1983. We wanted to know what people did when they were at their “personal best” in leading others. People see their individual leadership standards of excellence in these experiences. We started with an assumption that to discover best practices we did not have to interview and survey star performers, select celebrities, or people “at the top.” Instead, we assumed that by asking people at all levels and across a broad array of organizational settings to describe extraordinary experiences, we would be able to find and identify patterns of success. And we did.

The results of our initial investigation—and of the ongoing research we have conducted for nearly four decades—have been striking in their consistency and are a refutation of many leader stereotypes. People frequently assume, for example, that leadership is different from one type of organization or culture to the next. Nothing could be further from the truth. While each setting may look different from the outside, we find that what leaders do when they are at their best is quite similar. This pattern of behavior varies little across locations and circumstances. It’s true enough that the context keeps evolving, and the landscape of workplaces, communities, and countries has shifted over time, but leadership remains an understandable and generalizable process. While each leader

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is a unique individual, there are shared patterns to the practice of leadership. In each chapter of this book, you will find empirical evidence that shows the positive difference leaders without titles make across a wide spectrum of settings.

You can find out more about how we conducted the research for this book in the Appendix. Details about the research methodology, including psychometric properties of the *Leadership Practices Inventory* and analytics, as well as highlights of validation studies by various independent scholars are available on our website: [www.leadershipchallenge.com](http://www.leadershipchallenge.com). Those interested in broadening their perspective on leadership should look at some of our other leadership books, such as *Credibility: How Leaders Gain and Lose It, Why People Demand It*; *The Truth About Leadership: The No-Fads, Heart-of-the-Matter Facts You Need to Know*; and *Learning Leadership: The Five Fundamentals of Becoming an Exemplary Leader*.

## A Guidebook on Leadership

Consider *Everyday People, Extraordinary Leadership* as a guidebook to take along on your leadership journey. We have designed it to describe what leaders do, explain the fundamental principles that support these leadership practices, and provide actual case examples of real people in the workplace or community who demonstrate each practice. Based on the real-world experiences of thousands of people who have answered the call for leadership, we offer specific recommendations on what you can do to make these practices your own and to continue your leadership development.

Chapter 1 introduces you to our point of view about leadership—specifically that leadership is not a position, hierarchical place, or genetic trait. We discuss leadership as a relationship, and we reveal who is at the top of the list of leadership role models. We describe the characteristics that people most desire in their leaders and present the foundation on which all great leadership is built. We briefly describe The Five Practices of Exemplary

## **Preface**

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Leadership® revealed in our research. We tell the leadership story from the inside and move outward, describing leadership first as a personal journey of exploration and then as a mobilization of others. The research shows that leadership is not the private reserve of a few charismatic men and women, but instead a learnable set of behaviors and actions people use when they are bringing forth the best from themselves and others.

In Chapters 2 through 6 we explore each of The Five Practices, one to a chapter, and demonstrate that taken together they provide an operating system for leadership. Once you understand the “operating system,” you can create and run any number of different applications off of it, akin to what an operating system provides for computer software. Discussions build on the results of our original research, buttressed by studies from other scholars, and provide a particular point of view on leadership that is empirically sound and practically useful. Case examples and empirical evidence generously illustrate each leadership practice and document how using more of each practice yields more favorable outcomes. Each chapter has recommended actions, concluding with two specific first steps that you should take to put the leadership practice to use in developing your leadership capabilities.

In Chapter 7, we share some concluding research on how leadership matters not only to your colleagues or community, but also to you personally. We discuss six fundamentals for learning leadership, and explore three basic types of learning opportunities. In so doing we aim to demystify leadership and show how every person has the capacity to learn to lead. Finally, we advise that the process of becoming the best leader you can be will fundamentally change who you are and how you present yourself day in and day out. To that end, we offer a concluding reflective activity to help you get started on the next stage of your leadership journey.

## **The Future of Leadership**

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The domain of leaders is the future. We hope this book contributes to the ongoing revitalization of the workplace, to the renewal of healthy

## Preface

communities, and to greater respect and understanding among people of all traditions. We fervently hope that it enriches your life and the lives of your colleagues, your friends, and family. The most significant contribution you can make as a leader is to strengthen others so they can adapt, grow, and flourish.

Leadership matters. It's essential in every sector, in every community, and in every country. In these times of unprecedented change, organizations and communities need more leaders, and now more than ever they need leaders who can unite and mobilize others in a common cause.

So much extraordinary work needs to be done, and you have the opportunity to make a meaningful difference in how it is done. Accept the challenge to learn to become the best leader you can be—for the sake of your community, your workplace, and for those you love.

James M. Kouzes  
Barry Z. Posner  
*November 2020*



## CHAPTER 1

# Leadership Is Not a Position

**WHEN YOU HEAR** the word “leader,” what immediately comes to mind?

Maybe you think of someone with a title, such as CEO, president, prime minister, or admiral. Maybe you think of some famous public figure, such as a celebrity actor or singer, start-up founder, or pro athlete. Maybe you think of someone from the history books who led a revolution, conquest, or world-changing movement. Or maybe you think of someone who created a breakthrough invention, won the Nobel or Pulitzer Prize, wrote a best-selling novel or Grammy-winning song. It’s rather common to see these kinds of responses. They are reinforced every time you read one of those lists of the “50 Greatest Leaders of the Year.” In fact, if you take a look at one of the most well-known lists, you’ll see that 100 percent of the so-called “greatest leaders” fall into these categories.<sup>1</sup> It’s true for young leaders as well. In a list of young global leaders prepared by the World Economic Forum, 85 percent of the young leaders held the title of a senior executive, founder, or government official.<sup>2</sup> The majority of “leaders” who make these lists and are featured in the popular press are people with titles and at the apex of their organizations.

It's not that these individuals aren't leaders. They are. It's just that they are *not* the *only* leaders on the planet. In fact, they aren't even the majority of leaders. We've collected data from millions of people around the world and we can report, without a doubt, that there are leaders everywhere. There are leaders in every profession, discipline, and field, in every type of organization and industry, every religion, and every country; you find them from young to old, male, female, and gender non-conforming, across every ethnic and cultural category. Leaders are not just found at the top of organizations; they abound at all levels, including the middle, as well as on the front lines. There are leaders outside of formal organizations, too, in neighborhoods, community associations, clubs, sports teams, and families.

You could have a title like manager, director, or vice president. You could have people who report to you directly, but these would not necessarily make you a leader. Titles are granted, but being a leader is something that you earn, and you earn it not by your place in the organization but by how you behave. And through your behavior, you earn recognition as a leader in the eyes of those around you, and in the relationships you have with them. Indeed, it's much more likely that you are a leader who is a parent, coach, teacher, frontline worker, project manager, volunteer, community activist, or concerned citizen. You could also be a leader who is an individual contributor, professional, volunteer, analyst, consultant, representative, administrator, engineer, or scientist. You don't have to be at the top to lead; you can lead from any position or place.

So let's get something straight right from the start. Leadership is *not* a hierarchical level. It is not a title or a rank. It is not a position of power or a place of privilege. When you look up the word *leadership* in the dictionary it does not start with an uppercase *L*. It starts with a lowercase *l*, and *lead*, *leader*, and *leadership* literally derive from the word meaning "to go" or "to guide." That's what leadership is all about: going places and guiding others.

From whom do people seek this kind of guidance and direction? We decided to find out.