

JAMES M. KOUZES
BARRY Z. POSNER

Bestselling authors of *The Leadership Challenge*



LEARNING LEADERSHIP

The *5 Fundamentals* of Becoming an
EXEMPLARY LEADER



Praise for *Learning Leadership*

“How heartening it is to see definitive proof that great leaders are made, not born. Learn for yourself how to make critical connections, collect, and use constructive feedback, and lead any size organization with deliberation and success with the wisdom mined, analyzed, and presented by Kouzes and Posner!”

—**Marshall Goldsmith**, #1 *New York Times*
Bestselling Author of *Triggers*, *MOJO*,
and *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*

“So, you want to be a leader? This book shows you how. With fluid writing, comprehensive research, and actionable insights, Kouzes and Posner debunk myths and demonstrate that leadership is comprised of a clear set of skills and abilities that can be learned, practiced, and mastered.”

—**Tina Seelig**, Professor of the Practice, Stanford School of
Engineering; Author of *Insight Out*, *inGenius*, and
What I Wish I Knew When I Was 20

“Kouzes and Posner believe, as I do, that leaders are made, and they support that belief with hard evidence and live examples. *Learning Leadership* is rich with essential tools and practical advice for becoming an extraordinary leader in any environment. This is the book you need to come out on top!”

—**John C. Maxwell**, *New York Times*
Bestselling Author and Leadership Expert

“*Learning Leadership* covers the fundamentals of what it takes to become an exemplary leader. Kouzes and Posner have done a wonderful job recognizing and sharing the mindset of leaders as learners—and they offer evidence-based tools and techniques that you can put to use right away.”

—**Adam Grant**, Wharton Professor;
New York Times Bestselling Author of *Give and Take* and *Originals*

“In my work, people often ask, ‘Is there one best book you could recommend on leadership?’ In the past, that choice was difficult, but not anymore. *Learning Leadership* is that one book with widespread appeal and true value. This book gives each of us the ability to set upon a life-long path of development as leaders.”

—**Tom Kolditz**, Executive Director, Doerr Institute for New Leaders,
Rice University; Brigadier General, U.S. Army (ret);
Professor Emeritus, Behavioral Sciences and Leadership, West Point

“Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner have delivered (yet again!) with *Learning Leadership*. This relevant and engaging book powerfully demonstrates how leadership is, in fact, a learnable competency. It gives readers a useful framework on how to become a leader, and how to learn and grow as a leader. A wonderful blend of deep insight coupled with immediately practical application, *Learning Leadership* is indispensable to any current or aspiring leader.”

—**Stephen M. R. Covey**, *New York Times* Bestselling
Author of *The Speed of Trust*, and Coauthor of *Smart Trust*

“Kouzes and Posner have done it again. Recognizing the dynamic leadership challenges of the twenty-first century, they have created an essential leadership text that helps aspiring leaders lift their game in an ambitious but practical fashion.”

—**Doug Conant**, Chairman, Avon Products;
Former CEO, Campbell Soup Company; Founder and CEO,
ConantLeadership; Chairman, Kellogg Executive Leadership Institute

“A compelling and practical read from two of the most trusted thinkers in the field, *Learning Leadership* is a road map to becoming the best leader you can be.”

—**Chip Conley**, *New York Times* Bestselling Author of
Emotional Equations; Head of Global Hospitality and Strategy, AirBnB

“*Learning Leadership* is an excellent guidebook for those who are newer to leadership and the concepts and design also lend themselves to the continuous practice of the seasoned leader as well. I appreciate the concept of the leadership journal and self-coaching actions shared at the end of each chapter as they guide the reader in reflection and practice.”

—**Katya Armistead**, Dean of Student Life,
University of California, Santa Barbara

“In this wonderful book, Kouzes and Posner have summarized, in a highly engaging and accessible way, the very best lessons from irrefutable research about how to become the best leader you can possibly be. I wish I had it available 30 years ago: I would have recommended it to every single job candidate, as I will do from now on.”

—**Claudio Fernández-Aráoz**, Senior Advisor,
Egon Zehnder; Author of *It's Not the
How or the What But the Who*

“Discover your inner leader. Embrace that everyone has leadership potential. Use the resources and practices in this book to tap your inner leader. For young and emerging leaders this is the book for learning leadership and empowering others.”

—**Juana Bordas**, Bestselling Author of Award-Winning Book *Salsa, Soul, and Spirit: Leadership for a Multicultural Age*

“We all talk about leadership as a journey and I believe Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner just provided us with the map. Cover to cover *Learning Leadership: The Five Fundamentals of Becoming an Exemplary Leader* is exceptional and should become required reading for every leader regardless of their age or experience. A sincere thank you to Jim and Barry for their lifelong commitment to bringing out the leader in all of us.”

—**Mark Fernandes**, Chief Leadership Officer, Luck Companies

“Hugely inspiring and motivating. Kouzes and Posner show how people at every level can develop as leaders from the inside out by identifying what they uniquely have to bring to their organization, team, or community—proactively, without waiting to be singled out. *Learning Leadership* affirms that every one of us can all make, not just a difference, but also the particular difference we want to make in the world. This is a wonderful and important book.”

—**Sally Helgesen**, Author of *The Female Vision*, *The Web of Inclusion*, and *The Female Advantage*

“Every emerging leader needs a great vivid picture of what great leadership looks like. They have a lifetime to mold and shape their future. Jim and Barry provide the map and the landmarks for this crucial leadership journey. They certainly have the background and experience to be the Sherpas!”

—**Beverly Kaye**, Founder, Career Systems International;
Coauthor of *Love 'Em or Lose 'Em: Getting Good People to Stay*
and *Hello Stay Interviews, Goodbye Talent Loss*

“*Learning Leadership* is a practical and wonderful road map for anyone in leadership considering leadership or afraid they were not good enough for leadership. Jim and Barry challenge and motivate the reader every step of the way to reach inside for the latent capabilities for great leadership. The research and case studies are undeniable proof that there is opportunity for greatness in each and every one of us.”

—**Kory Kogon**, Global Productivity Practice Leader, Franklin Covey;
Coauthor of *The 5 Choices: The Path to Extraordinary Productivity*

“Learning Leadership captures the essence of being lifelong learners striving to be the best that one can be. The big ideas in this book reaffirm why effective leaders, both students and educators, must be learning leaders and why they inspire engagement, make a difference, and must believe in themselves as having the power and capacity to be exemplary. *Learning Leadership* will no doubt be the valuable foundational resource that will fuel my leadership work for the next decade.”

—**Wendy Lim**, Assistant Superintendent of Schools, Richmond, British Columbia, Canada

“Jim and Barry’s insightful book reminds young professionals that their education does not stop with graduation. They must continue to learn, to practice, and to develop as leaders, and the five fundamental lessons of leadership in the book guide and inspire this new generation into becoming the leaders of tomorrow.”

—**Susan Luchey**, Leadership and Career Consultant; Directs Leadership Program, University of Delaware

“The conversational and optimistic tone of *Learning Leadership* belies the serious leadership culture shift that Kouzes and Posner highlight in this rich addition to the leadership bookshelf. Readers are invited to evaluate their capacity to lead—and that of those around them—in the context of upending the social belief that only certain individuals ‘belong’ in the leadership pipeline. The growth-and-the-greater-good mindset the authors emphasize for preparing everyone to lead is an easy and welcome mantra to embrace. The earlier this philosophy can be introduced to young adults and their mentors, the better; and *Learning Leadership* is an excellent springboard.”

—**Mariam G. MacGregor**, Professional Development Center, Neeley School of Business, Texas Christian University; Author of the Award-Winning *Building Everyday Leadership* curriculum

“In a leadership development space that is often full of sizzle and ‘revolutionary’ new ideas that lack real substance, Kouzes and Posner offer sound advice that is incredibly valuable for emerging leaders and existing leaders looking to sharpen their skills alike. Kouzes and Posner offer a perfect combination of hard facts and analysis derived from deep research and anecdotes that are both practical and relatable. They don’t focus on the one-in-a-billion success stories of celebrity entrepreneurs and business people that are often rooted in inapplicable circumstance—instead they make leadership development tangible, sharing stories from everyday people, making their sage advice more achievable. Each

chapter's Self-Coaching Actions bring their core leadership principles to life, leading you to not only think through how each applies to you, but also to implement what you have learned."

—**Aaron McDaniel**, Millennial Expert, Speaker, Entrepreneur;
Author of *The Young Professional's Guide Series*

"It's time to stop looking outside for answers, to wake up to the divine brilliance that each of us represents. Life is too short to be a follower of someone else's dream, to keep playing small by giving away our power. It's up to each of us to lead, to smash through the threshold of fear and to rise up and make our mark in our own unique way. With *Learning Leadership*, Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner have created an excellent road map to help us on this journey, offering practical tips and examples to help you realize your innate greatness."

—**Ruairí McKiernan**, Award-Winning Social Entrepreneur and Presidential Appointee to Ireland's Council of State

"How many times do people get told they simply 'aren't a leader'? More often than not, it's because there's one mold that we're trying to fit people into. But leadership comes in all shapes and forms, and needs this multitude. It needs the onliness—that unique perspective born of your history and experience visions and hopes that only you can bring. This book shows you how."

—**Nilofer Merchant**, Former Apple and High-Tech Executive and Entrepreneur; Winner of Thinkers50 Award of Future Thinkers; the number one person in the world most likely to influence the future of management in both theory and practice.

"It has always been valuable to bring Jim and Barry's work to my students and young leaders. With *Learning Leadership*, they continue to impress, giving new insights, captivating stories, and practical tips, ultimately revitalizing our perceptions of what it means to be a leader, helping others to grow and to learn, and discover exactly what leadership is and how to achieve it."

—**Bill Shannon**, Former Executive, Duke Clinical Research Institute

"*Learning Leadership* is another jewel from leadership gurus Kouzes and Posner. Whether you are a new leader or have many years of experience, I guarantee you will find valuable development ideas for you and your organization in this book."

—**Steve Skarke**, President, The Kaneka Foundation

“Learning Leadership is like having your own personal leadership coach. Or make that coaches. Top leadership thinkers Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner distill thirty years of hands-on research into a book so filled with practical tips that you’re guaranteed to become a better leader. “

—**Bill Treasurer**, CEO, Giant Leap Consulting;
Author of *Leaders Open Doors*

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**THE FIVE FUNDAMENTALS OF BECOMING
AN EXEMPLARY LEADER**

JAMES M. KOUZES
BARRY Z. POSNER

WILEY

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*We gratefully dedicate this book to Travis Carrigan,
Amanda Crowell, Abigail Donahue, Garrett Jensen,
Amelia Klawon, David Klawon, Armeen Komeili,
Nicholas Lopez, Amanda Posner, and William J. Stribling.*

*These leaders reviewed this book in various draft stages,
providing feedback, raising questions, sharing experiences,
and offering insights. They kept us focused on leadership—
on the skills and behaviors accessible to anyone who wants
to learn about becoming, and being, more effective—
regardless of his or her position, role, time, or place.*

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INTRODUCTION

THE WORLD NEEDS EXEMPLARY LEADERS

There's a leadership shortage in the world. It's not a shortage of potential talent. The people are out there. The eagerness is out there. The resources are out there. The capability is out there.

The shortage is a result of three primary factors: demographic shifts, insufficient training and experiences, and the prevailing mindsets that discourage people from learning to lead.

Currently 25 percent of the global workforce comprises millennials (those born between 1981 and 1997), and in some countries that number approaches 50 percent.¹ By 2025 estimates are that millennials will comprise 75 percent of the global workforce. At the same time as their numbers in the workplace are growing daily, organizations around the world do not feel that they have an ample leadership pipeline to meet present and future needs.² An alarming 86 percent of respondents to the latest World Economic Forum survey think there is a *leadership crisis* in the world today,³ and most companies are *seriously worried* about their leadership bench strength.⁴ The

demographic shifts are simply creating demand for exemplary leadership that exceeds supply.⁵

If the need for leadership development is great, then why is the pipeline nearly empty? Part of the answer comes from research conducted by leadership scholar Jack Zenger. He looked at his worldwide database of people participating in leadership training and found that their average age was 42. However, the average age of supervisors in the database was 33. “It follows then,” Jack reports, “that if they’re not entering leadership training programs until they’re 42, they are getting no leadership training at all as supervisors. And they’re operating with the company untrained, on average, for over a decade.”⁶ Wow!

Let us ask you something: Would you seek medical treatment from an untrained physician? Would you allow an untrained accountant to audit your company’s books? Or, would you hire an untrained engineer to design a new self-driving car? Of course you wouldn’t. So, why is this permitted with leaders?

Here’s another sobering fact to add to this shortage of leadership and inadequate preparation. There has been a global decline in the level of trust that people have in their leaders. According to the Edelman Trust Barometer—a highly respected annual study of trust in major institutions and their leaders—“the number of countries with trusted institutions has fallen to an all-time low among the informed public. Among the general population, the trust deficit is even more pronounced, with nearly two-thirds of countries falling into the distruster category.”⁷ Around the world people trust their leaders less and less—no wonder there is a leadership crisis.

For all the talk about the importance of leadership development and the need for better leaders, organizations—including governments and schools—have been putting little of their money where their mouths are. They haven’t been doing what

they say is vitally important. This is a somber global concern. At the same time, it is a huge opportunity for those organizations and individuals who choose to take the initiative.

It's this opportunity that motivated us to write this book. We've been researching and writing about leadership for three and a half decades, and we've been developing leaders for even longer. But we're seeing a growing divide between demand and supply that needs to be filled—and filled rapidly. We want to continue contributing not only to narrowing that chasm but also to supporting the initiative to create more and better leaders for the world.

THE LEADERSHIP MINDSET

In seminars we've been asking participants this question: "How many of you think of yourself as a leader?" In a group of 50 people, typically only six raise their hands. Even though these are usually people who have come together for leadership development, only about 10 percent identify themselves as leaders. Perhaps people are being modest and they think that if they say they're leaders they'll appear arrogant and as braggadocios. Maybe. But we think there's more to it than that. A mythology about leadership persists that makes people reluctant to claim leadership for themselves. It's as if leadership starts with a capital *L* and is reserved only for those with some special talent, birthright, gene, calling, position, or title. This perspective creates an invisible barrier and is a limiting belief that stops many from answering the call.

Debi Coleman is one of the first leaders we ever interviewed about personal-best leadership practices and the first leader we quoted in the very first edition of our book *The Leadership Challenge*. At that time Debi was vice president of worldwide manufacturing for Apple Computers. In our interview she

explained, “I think good people deserve good leadership. The people I manage deserve the best leadership in the world.”⁸ Debi is now managing partner of SmartForest Ventures, a venture capital firm, and serves on numerous boards. When we caught up with her again, we learned that her perspective on leadership is the same today as when we first talked with her more than 30 years ago.

Debi expresses the spirit of all exemplary leaders. They strive mightily to deliver the best leadership in the world because they firmly believe that people deserve it. Most likely that’s exactly what you want from your leaders. If you believe that the people you now lead, or will lead in the future, deserve the best leadership in the world and if it’s clear that there’s a growing need for an increased quantity and quality of leaders, then it is imperative that you become the best leader you can be. Step one is to develop a leadership mindset. You don’t have to wait for an organization to offer a program for you to become the best. Nor do you have to wait for someone else to give you permission or provide some special resource. Just as Dorothy and her colleagues in *The Wizard of Oz* discovered, you already have everything you need to become an exemplary leader.

This is the other reason why we wrote this book. We want to address and rectify some prevailing myths and misconceptions about what it takes to *learn to become* an exemplary leader.

LEARNING TO BECOME AN EXEMPLARY LEADER

After more than 30 years of research, we know that *you* are fully capable of leading. You may not realize it or fully believe it, but it’s true. It’s also true for 99.999 percent of people in the world. (That’s a statistic we’ll explain in one of the early chapters.) The larger purpose of this book is to share with you

what we've learned about how you can create the conditions, inside yourself and in the context in which you live and work, to become a much better leader than you are today.

We show that you can learn to be a better leader than you are today if you believe in yourself, aspire to be great, challenge yourself to grow, engage the support of others, and practice deliberately. In each of the chapters of this book, we share a key message about developing exemplary leadership, and we offer a practical tip on how to increase your capacity to lead.

Learning Leadership is divided into seven parts. Part I is on the fundamentals. It sets the tone for the book and provides the context for discussing what people need to do to become better leaders. We talk about the myths and assumptions that inhibit leadership development, the five fundamentals of becoming an exemplary leader, the evidence that leadership matters, and how you are already leading but not frequently enough.

In Part II of *Learning Leadership*, we discuss the essential elements of the first fundamental: Believe you can. We stress how important it is to have a strong belief in your capabilities and a mindset that leadership can be learned. We present evidence that learning is the master skill and that leadership emerges from within.

Part III is about the second fundamental: Aspire to excel. This part of the book talks about the importance of knowing who you are and knowing what is important to you. You can't lead others if you don't know yourself. You also have to be concerned about the future. Who you are today is not who you will be in the future, and the same is true for your constituents. We also point out that leadership is a relationship and not simply about the leader's personal aspirations. Leadership requires you to know and appreciate your constituents.

Part IV addresses the third fundamental of becoming an exemplary leader: Challenge yourself. This part of the book

discusses how challenge is critical to learning. You need to take initiative in your own development. We point out that there will be inevitable setbacks and failures along the way that require grit, courage, and resilience to persist in learning and becoming the best you can be.

Part V is about the fourth fundamental: Engage support. Here we point out that everyone who achieves excellence gets support and coaching along the way. Whether it's family, managers at work, or professional coaches, leaders need the advice and counsel and the care and support of others. To learn leadership, you need to get connected to a network of resources. You also need feedback to know what progress you are making, how you are growing, and what you still need to be working on.

The fifth fundamental, practice deliberately, is the focus of Part VI. In this part we talk about the fact that to become great at leadership, you have to spend time practicing the skills. Just being in the role of a leader is insufficient. You have to set goals, participate in designed learning experiences, ask for feedback, and get coaching. You also have to put in the time every day and make learning leadership a daily habit.

Part VII of *Learning Leadership* is on the will and the way. We conclude the book with a chapter that summarizes the key messages and offers commentary on how it's essential to follow through on your commitments to learn. The proof is in the doing, not in the deciding to do. We also stress how critical it is for leaders to be positive, energetic, and hopeful. In tough times these are vital ingredients in becoming exemplary.

WHO SHOULD READ THIS BOOK

As we wrote this book we kept the emerging leaders in the forefront of our minds—those who aspire to a leadership role,

those who are just beginning to supervise others, and those who must necessarily influence and work with other people to accomplish their objectives. We want *Learning Leadership* to be a guide you can use as you develop your self-concept as a leader and your ideas about what leadership means. We wanted to provide a framework that would help you create a context as well as foster a set of beliefs conducive to your growth and development.

In addition, *Learning Leadership* will be of great value to leadership developers, internal and external trainers, and coaches who are focused on building the next generation of leaders in their client organizations—as well as those who have a responsibility and need to help people be the best they can be. This includes supervisors and managers at all levels. The next generations of leaders need your wisdom and experience if they are going to excel and take your organizations to the next level.

According to recent studies, more than 50 percent of young people want to become leaders in their organizations, although they don't necessarily view *organization* in a traditional way. We know that they also seek challenging assignments and are willing to work hard but that their greatest fear is that there's a "lack of professional growth opportunity" in too many of their organizations.⁹ Their willingness to stick around may well be contingent upon how well leadership developers and managers respond to this need.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

We want you to *use Learning Leadership* and not just read it. To that end, we've divided the book into short, bite-sized chapters. Read during a train ride to work, while taking a break in your day, or in the evening when you want to spend some

time thinking about how you will enhance your leadership capabilities. Also, in each of the chapters that follow, there is a self-coaching action. It's something you can do in a few minutes right then, but you may want to return to these later when you have more time. For most of these actions, we strongly recommend you create a leadership journal. Journaling has been shown to be one of the most effective learning tools and significantly helps you embed the learning you derive from each chapter. Your journal can be just a spiral-bound notebook, something fancier, or an electronic file in your tablet or desktop. It'll be a place to store your reflections, responses, experiences, and lessons learned. And keep it handy. We have a feeling that you'll want to refer to it again and again.

Early reviewers of this book have told us that there's a lot to do here. We agree. It can seem quite daunting. As with learning any set of skills, you must constantly practice if you want to improve. There's no such thing as instant expertise. Putting these concepts into practice takes time, and for exemplary leaders, they believe that it's a lifelong learning journey.

Go at your own pace. People have different learning styles. You might want to read the entire text and then go back and do the self-coaching actions. You may want to take a section at a time and read it over a period of weeks or even months. You might want to do the coaching activities chapter by chapter. Use the ideas in this book in whatever way works for you. The point is that learning leadership requires practice, practice takes time, and you can learn to be a better leader than you are today.

Finally, give yourself a bit of grace. If you are serious about becoming a better leader, and willing to put in the time and effort, then don't forget to take care of yourself. Pace yourself. You can't build muscle strength all at once; rest between exercises is necessary. Similarly, every suggestion you have for yourself, or others, will not be spot-on the first time. There will be setbacks.

Make sure you build an internal, possibly even external, support system that can get you through the inescapable missteps and disappointments along the leadership journey. You may lose some battles, but keep your eye on the bigger picture.

The world needs exemplary leaders. And it needs exemplary leaders at all levels and in all functions. Your constituents, as well as your colleagues, need you to become the best leader you can be. They need you to lead with your best self. They need you to become an exemplary leader not only for today; they need you to be exemplary tomorrow and into the future. We hope this book will be stimulating and informative on your journey to becoming an exemplary leader.

*James M. Kouzes
Orinda, California*

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April 2016

PART I

LEARNING LEADERSHIP FUNDAMENTALS

Leadership potential isn't something that some people have and other people don't. It's much more broadly distributed than traditionally accepted views suggest. You already have the capacity to lead, but some prevailing myths and assumptions about leadership get in the way of your becoming the best leader you can be. To become an exemplary leader, you have to move past the myths and get down to applying the fundamentals that will enable you to learn and grow as a leader.

Leadership is essential because it makes a significant difference in people's levels of engagement, commitment, and performance. Developing your leadership capabilities will help you improve the way people around you feel about their workplace and promote more productive organizations. Learning to be a better leader also enhances your feelings of self-worth and meaningfulness.

Our research shows that a universal set of leadership practices is associated with exemplary leadership, and these practices are within the capacity of everyone to follow. The challenge is to increase the frequency with which you engage in these leadership practices and become more comfortable and confident in their use.

In the next three chapters we take a look at these key themes on becoming an exemplary leader:

- Leaders are born and so are you.
- Leadership makes a difference.
- You are already leading, just not frequently enough.