

Preface

Decide what to be, and go be it.
- *The Avett Brothers, Head Full of Doubt*

Welcome to Leadership

I've never heard a high school senior approaching their first year of college answer, "leadership" when being asked what they plan to study.

Have you?

Management tends to pass the lips and into the ears instead. It's easier to understand. It's accepted.

We know people who have management degrees. We may have management degrees. People know what management is, or so they think.

The listener will nod and say how wonderful it is that the young student wants to be in a management role even remarking, "What a smart decision."

If you say "leadership" in answering that question, the inquirer will look puzzled.

It's unfamiliar. How can anyone study leadership? What would that even entail? They don't know anyone with a leadership degree nor have one themselves. The idea seems crazy.

Management is learned. It's clean. Easily defined. Leadership is experienced. It's messy. Open to interpretation.

Management ties the human-ness of leadership in a different box with a neatly wrapped bow that makes it more palatable.

Leadership is becoming the gift we'd instead get.

Discussions in the business world, in the news, in classrooms, and over cocktails are changing and moving from concepts of management to that of theories of leadership.

However, why? Why does studying and understanding leadership matter now more than twenty years ago?

Why are we even talking about this yet alone reading a book about it? Why do we want to be leaders?

Honestly, it's hard to say. Some try, in any case.

Is it because of the internet and increased awareness? Sure.

Is it because of the changing workforce with Baby Boomers, Millennials and the like? Could be.

Is it possibly due to one of many blanketed business words and terms? Globalization? Competitive advantage? Work/life integration? Maybe.

Alternatively, is it because people realize that studying leadership, understanding leadership and being a leader is a more holistic and comprehensive way to work with people and to ensure organizational as well as life success?

Yes.

We see more value in leadership now, and we realize its importance more than ever. We all need and want more leaders.

Plus, we're starved for good leaders and strong leadership. From that hunger, we want to be leaders in our own lives for our reasons.

What matters, though, is that we have leadership on the brain. We're leadership obsessed. We want to work for companies with strong leadership. We want our managers to be leaders (not just the "boss"). We want to be leaders.

What separates leaders from followers is simple - it's a decision. It's a decision to lead. We can decide to act, or not.

Leadership and being a leader is as simple, and as complicated, as that.

The Layout Decision

This book is separated into sections based on the leadership decision-making model called APE. APE stands for awareness, practice, and evaluation.

The APE Model serves as a guide on how we can make decisions about our leadership ability, development and growth.

Let's build on this further in both the general sense and in how the book is organized around the APE Model.

The first section focuses on our awareness of leadership. This includes defining what leadership is, what it isn't and why we may need to readdress how we view and define it both for ourselves and how we determine the value and the impact of those who lead.

Is leadership simply a title at work?

No. It's more. In realizing this, how can we create our leadership brand to lead and live by? This is the foundation of what I call the "leadership lifestyle."

In the Awareness section, we'll challenge your assumptions and thoughts about leadership and the way its practice is viewed.

In understanding, you'll be able to refine your definitions to base a foundation for yourself and your decisions.

Here, we will talk further about where leadership has gone off the tracks in how people define it.

Hint: Leadership is not only a forty-something, balding, white male with a "VP" title. I'll talk more about this later on.

The Awareness section introduces other concepts to highlight further and challenge the way that we understand leadership and how we can then rethink our understanding when making decisions about our leadership.

Section one also introduces concepts about the brain, perception, and behavior. In understanding each, we can use this knowledge to change and develop our leadership behaviors through our decisions.

In aligning with the APE Model in both layout and with making decisions to lead, the second section focuses on practice.

What behaviors are you going to address, practice and demonstrate to position yourself for leadership success? Think: *What are you going to do?*

This section addresses the APE Model in further detail.

Here, you can assess your use of the model in thinking about:

- How can you become aware of what you need to practice and develop to enhance your leadership ability?
- How can you practice the skills and behaviors that will aid in your leadership capacity, growth and brand overall?
- How can you then evaluate your efforts to continue your work?

In reading, you will gain insight on how you can frame your decisions by using the APE Model to enhance your leadership practice while also addressing practical solutions on how you can use this text in your real life to make a difference that will matter to you.

The second section on practice also introduces another framework for consideration called TOLL.

TOLL is an acronym for timing, opportunity, looks and likes and why each matter to us as leaders.

Why TOLL? Because this introduces a level of reality that other books don't.

In giving thought to TOLL, we can identify in our realities why things may not be changing and how using this awareness framework, along with the APE Model, can further aid in our decision-making and progress.

Evaluation is the third section that illuminates commonly thought of behaviors, traits, and abilities that we evaluate people whom we consider leaders.

This section aims to provide you with specific areas of focus to start your leadership decision-making journey.

Section two addresses practical ways we can evaluate ourselves with the APE Model while section three provides skills that we can use as a starting point to practice.

In keeping with the consistency of the APE Model for leadership development and the layout, the skills focused on are concerning As, Ps, and Es including one other that often comes to mind when we talk about what makes a leader a leader: Communication.

Ugh. Communication. The umbrella issue of all leadership and business concerns.

Not enough. Not right. Not on time.

Surprise, the issue isn't always communication. It's a catchall for leadership blunders that can be avoided through other, more straightforward decisions.

We'll talk more about later on.

Once you've defined and evaluated leadership to broaden your awareness, you've learned more about the APE Model and how you can use this in your practice along with giving further consideration to the skills that will elevate you to leadership status, this leads us to the fourth section.

This final section concludes with a roadmap and insight on uniting the concepts. In reading, you will find ways to think about your leadership: where you are, where you want to be and feel empowered knowing that you can get there through your decisions.

A Note on Anonymity

Becoming and being a leader can either be viewed as a collaborative effort in thinking about working with others, asking for feedback and coaching, and sharing best practices and results in a conversation.

Or, it can be viewed as a private practice.

Some may want to keep the practice of leadership to themselves for some reasons. One of which that I hear often is people being scared of being judge and hearing feedback that their practice isn't paying off.

One can have their reasons due to personal and work circumstances, too. Alternatively, maybe some don't feel fully supported and confident enough to share.

Whatever the case may be, it may take time for some to be comfortable talking about their leadership with others and that's okay. It can be hard at first to get comfortable saying, "I am a leader," or, "I'm working on a being a leader."

Neither statement shows weakness or failure. It shows that you are trying.

You may want to start your practice as private and over time build up to soliciting feedback from others and sharing your practice. And, that's okay.

In keeping with the need for privacy within one's leadership journey, and relation to this particular text, I discuss situations and experiences that are unique to me from what I have studied and observed in others.

I share these for the sake of helping you to think about your life, practice, and experiences to aid in your leadership decisions.

Those not painted within the best of light within this text, I mask their identities as, maybe at the time or how they viewed particular circumstances, thought their decisions were the right ones for whatever reason.

Keep this in mind as we've all worked with and for people who made mistakes and who may have treated us or others poorly. Maybe it was on purpose or perhaps it was a mistake.

Let's assume, for the most part, that it was a mistake, so it doesn't damper our journey and thoughts on leadership.

We don't have to be, or even become, those people. We can't hold grudges for lousy leadership. However, we can learn from it.

We can learn a lot from seeing bad behavior, experiencing bad leadership and having people treat us in a way that we would never treat others.

That, within itself, can be the most significant learning tool of all in helping us make better decisions about our leadership.

So, Really, Why Are We Here?

If you're like me, you think about leadership. So maybe you're like me in that you ask yourself, "What makes a leader, a leader?" in trying to find the answer.

I wanted to write a book that challenged the way people think about leadership.

After reading book after book, taking class after class and listening to podcast after podcast about leadership myself, I struggled with the confusing messaging.

Some positioned the concept of leadership in ways that made it seem almost unattainable while others painted leadership in ways that seemed over-simplistic.

Some of these people seemed out of touch in thinking about today's work environment written by people who may not have ever worked in the corporate setting for years, if ever, due to being buried deep in research about behavior and best practices within the holds of academia.

While I respect and see the value in what people have outlined in understanding leadership, I see a need that people, regardless of the title that they have within a corporation or job or wherever they want to lead in life, need to know that leadership is possible.

Everyone and anyone can be a leader. Leadership isn't only for the selected few. Some disagree and think that leadership is something you're born with - or not.

Some make the idea of leadership overly complicated. Some think that taking certain classes or reading certain books or mixing the two is the only real preparation.

The reality is that leadership shouldn't be hidden away for only the brightest and best. Leadership is something that we are all capable of.

It shouldn't be based on a score or ranking we get on some personality profile or behavioral analysis. We all can develop, change and be leaders if we want it.

This book is for those who wake up and think, “Crap, I have to wake up, go to work, sit there all day and act as (insert whatever your title is here) and then come home, parent, and somehow make a difference in the community.”

This book is for those who sometimes need a reminder about how we can change that directly through our decisions.

Sometimes we wait around for things to happen to us. Promotions are given to justify our ability to lead.

None of that matters. What matters is that you are making decisions about your leadership ability today.

You are taking ownership in trying to live a leadership lifestyle within the APE Model in gaining awareness (A), practicing getting better (P) and then looking to those you trust and to yourself for evaluation (E).

Within the leadership decision framework with the help of the APE Model, you can begin to make changes to your leadership ability and your life.

Will you decide to lead today?