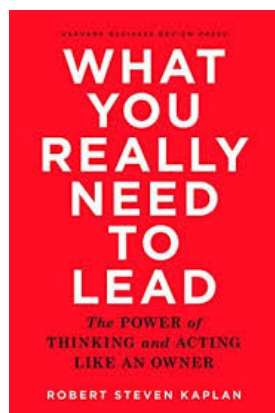


## BOOK REVIEW



### “What you really need to lead” Are Leaders Born or Leaders Made?

**Robert Steven Kaplan**

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Leadership is an often, debated topic in social sciences and businesses. A person leading a group of people, be it politics, sports, corporate or a project, is always measured and assessed.

In his book “*What you really need to lead*“, Robert Kaplan, Professor from Harvard Business School, says leadership is a skill that can be acquired given the right training. In a very concise and precise manner he writes about the method in which leadership skills can be self-developed. A professor who, teaches Leadership as a subject at the Harvard Business School, he probably is the right person to write about leadership.

Many people are unconvinced that leadership cannot be taught, just like Ethics, leadership is just innate, inborn. Kaplan believes otherwise. He emphasizes on three critical elements that are required for a one to be a leader: Ownership, Challenges, and the essential process to think like a leader.

While there cannot be a magic pill to gulp and become a leader, the book is a good read to understand what people, put in leadership positions, can inculcate as habits to become a successful one.

The Book is sectioned off into five chapters each one progressively suggesting what one needs to become a leader.

Kaplan says each one of us has a different perception of leadership and it means different things to different people. How does one define a successful leader? In the business sense is a successful leader one who brings in profits to the company? So, results, positive results are the characteristics of a successful leader.

The author uses an anecdotal approach for illustrating the discipline framework to be followed by persons who would aspire to be in leadership roles. Leadership is not a destination, one requires an open mind to learn, listen and work on a continuous basis. In particular, keeping the mind open to learning, and asking questions is the key to learn. In a boss-subordinate scenario the questioning by the subordinates may be reluctant given that the boss may not like to hear certain things.

- Having an ownership mindset is the first step to become a leader. The attitude – ‘why should I do it?’ is the first hurdle to cross. One needs to understand what stops them from taking ownership of the situation. ‘Why should not I be doing it?’ is the right step towards becoming a leader. This may work in an environment that is process driven and flatter organization structure.
- What are the challenges to tackle as a leader? The first challenge is the ability understand our own capabilities to handle a situation. The second, is to seek advice where required. Third, is open to

listening, not being critical, and letting people take ownership and do the right things are important aspects of leadership. The right communication between people in groups is highlighted to avoid isolation from what is happening around, while it is thought that the people at the top think, they know everything.

- The important processes for mastering leadership is having a vision (for a business unit/organization) and a passion for it. Having a list of priorities, not more than 3-4 is significant as a process to achieve leadership skills. What one has failed at, what was the best narrative that one can come up with in a leadership role has emphasized.
- Lastly none of the leadership successes are possible without people. Building good relationships with co-workers and harnessing their power as a group is the key to be a successful leader. Building successful relationships with people is based on trust, respect and understanding. Affection is not part of this!
- The process of leading is not something that ends, it is a journey that goes on and every new situation gives us something important to add to the leadership experience. Self-awareness about leadership styles,

aligning the strategies with the overall strategies, prioritizing right, taking the group of people along are the value add for the 'right' leadership goals.

If as a leader one feels they have failed, it is always better to have a feedback from somebody who is close. As a leader one must wear all kinds of hats, counsellor, coach, boss, friend, and confidant. Being leader does not make one have invincible powers. In fact, it is the opposite, leader is as vulnerable as any other person, but she has the ability to understand her vulnerability and work on it positively. As a teacher we at times are leaders to lead our students, thus taking ownership of the teaching-learning process, listening to the students, having a good student-teacher relation, taking the students as a group to achieve the learning is one lesson that I can take from the book. Finally let us not forget this does not get over with one academic year of one batch of students, this is a journey that each time make us discover newer dimensions to the whole learning-teaching-learning process.

On a lighter vein, may be the Mr. Trump can take a leaf out of this book!