

A Journey Begins

“This is just how it’s done,” he said, handing me over a heavy binder filled with tabbed entries. The policy is clear – failure to follow standards results in a negative write up.”

I took the heavy binder, but with hesitation. “But, has anyone talked to him before now, or tried to help?” I asked.

My boss sighed. “Look, Chrystin. Being the boss isn’t all fun and games. You have to make the tough decisions even if its unpopular. His bi-annual employee review should have been enough of a warning his performance wasn’t up to standards, but regardless we aren’t here to coddle and *mother* every person. It’s all there in the policy, its really black and white.”

This is the first moment I remember that made me think about leadership, the difference between being a leader and being a manager, and my own leadership style. It was, unfortunately, not the first time I had been subtly reminded that my own natural leadership style was at odds with the overwhelming majority of military leadership standards of the time.

I asked for time to review the policy before I met with the person in question, and after a long weekend of mind-numbing reading and notetaking, I came back to work with an arsenal of references, highlights and a prepared alternative plan. My boss – an excellent manager by any measurement – barely let me get started before interrupting with only two questions: Is this all within policy? And was I certain this is what (and who) I wanted to spend my time and energy on? My answer to both questions was a confident YES.

This is where my leadership journey truly began. My first experience with leadership as an adult came from my time in the United States Coast Guard. I enlisted directly after school and my first assignment was at a small boat station where my focus was largely on search and rescue operations. As a new member of the service, leadership was exactly as I anticipated it to be following 12 years of school, only exchanging teachers for uniformed men in a traditional position of power who led in a top – down, authoritative style. Classic, stereotypical military, and exactly what I expected when I joined the service.

It wasn't until I began to specialize in response and crisis management that I began to see this style of leadership as more of a hinderance than a boon when it came to leading both those whom I encountered during operations outside of my organization and those whom I was charged with leading as I was advanced within the organization. This single mindset of leadership and what it meant to be a leader brought to mind the old adage "When all you have is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail", and I found that my own personal leadership style was far removed from the traditional concept of military leadership so popular in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Fortunately for me, I was also exposed to many, *many* other leaders and leadership styles outside my immediate workplace who inspired me. I began to understand that "leadership" was not a static concept, nor was it just one thing. The more experience I gained and challenges I faced, the more confidence I had in myself and in my leadership ability. With twenty years of military service, I felt confident in my skills as a leader, but also knew there was more to learn. With that mindset of looking for the next opportunity for growth and development, I began my journey with the Gonzaga University leadership program. From those

years of study, experiences and sometimes uncomfortable challenges to my preconceptions and comfort zone, this book was formed.

About This Book

It's probably easier to tell you what this book is not. It is not a deep exploration of all the theories of leadership. It is also not an attempt to define or develop a new classification system or definition of leadership. Over the past half century or so, more than 65 different classification systems have been developed and defined by academics and researchers, and countless more iterations and variations on ideas can be found everyday with a simple web search or visit to the self-help section of your local library.

Instead, this book is a guided exploration of what leadership means to **you** and a means to help you start to develop your own personal leadership style and methods. This book is not a deep dive into any one school or philosophy of leadership: instead, it is an exploration for you to be exposed to different ideas and concepts and find what resonates with you. Just as leadership is not a linear event moving determinedly in one direction, neither is this book. This book, like leadership, is an interactive process. It is not built on linear, narrative chapters. Read these chapters and complete the activities in any order you like depending on your interest or what seems most relevant to you at the time. The skills, information, techniques and practices aren't blocks intended for you to stack on top of one another into your own personal Burj Khalifa tower of leadership. Think of them as suggestions and points of interest on a map. This book is a journey that you will plot for yourself.

Before you begin your exploration, however, let me explain the basic layout of the book and what to expect. This book is divided into sections, each with chapters and activities.

Section: Each section is built around a overarching theme for the chapters within.

Chapters: Specific topics with a shared theme. Each chapter covers a specific element or concept a bit more in depth and includes some suggested additional research and reading if you want to go deeper .

Activities: Each chapter will have several suggested activities included, ranging from journaling, to thought provoking activities and creative challenges. This is where **you** come in! Use these activities to dive into your own thoughts, reflections and development.

A special note on activities: Not every activity will resonate with you. Some may seem silly or even *impossible* for you to do. *I am no artist! I have don't have a creative bone in my body! That's kid stuff!* I can hear all of that going through your head now. But, I really encourage you to step outside of your comfort zone. Its just you and this book, after all...I promise you, there are no grades or judgement here. Activities are meant to spark thought and creativity, shake you lose from some of your habitual thoughts and get you used to stretching and thinking from new perspectives. It's okay if you are still resistant: there is no judgement in these pages. But: if you are thinking these things, or something similar, I challenge you to give it a try anyway. It could be fun!

Finally, at the end of this book, I have included references, broken down by chapter for easy reference and use. I have endeavored to create this book grounded in academic research, presented in an enjoyable, provoking and creative way. The world of leadership studies is remarkably vast, with a wide breadth and depth of studies, topics, theories and philosophies all seeming to constantly evolve and change as more data and reflection becomes available. These references, combined with the suggested additional research and reading list, will provide a potential starting point for any areas that you want to explore more in depth.

A Special Note to e-Version Readers

If you are reading an electronic version of this book, you will see rather quickly that there are a great number of activities that accompany the text. There are journal prompts and opportunities to reflect, but there are also creative challenges, writing, drawing and more. If you are reading this electronically, it would be difficult at best to complete these activities but I truly feel that trying is an important element. To that end, you can find an electronic version of *only* the interactive activities on my website (www.chrystinmclelland.com > *beta readers*) that you can print out for your own use. You can also use your own note or sketch book to complete the activities as you read along.

A Special Note to Beta Readers

Thank you all so much for volunteering your time and expertise in reading this book and for sharing your impressions and suggestions. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me at any point if you have comments, suggestions or concerns that I can assist with or that are not

captured in the short weekly surveys. To say I am excited about sharing this book with you and incorporating your feedback is an understatement!

As a reminder, there is no expectation for you to review grammar, spelling, syntax, punctuation, etc... While you are free to provide comments and let me know anything like that you catch, the book will be going in for final editing with dedicated editors. What is most valuable for me is your feedback on the content and activities. You will have access to a (short) survey each week to provide feedback, but you are absolutely free to share your thoughts and impressions beyond the digital survey if you like.

There are a few things that are not going to be included in the Beta version for you to review, the most obvious one being a full list of references / bibliography. It is still a work in progress, and I am still working on the best way to include the information. You will see in-text citations, but you won't see a full bibliography. However, if you are interested in any specific research or references, please let me know and I am happy to share with you!

The second thing you won't necessarily see are the 'sections' of this book. Chapters all share the same "XX" placeholder for the chapter number. While I have started grouping chapters into themes, the overall format and layout of the book is still evolving as I make changes to the original layouts as I work with the unique demands of publishing software. If you have inserted images and tables into an existing MS Word document and had wildly unexpected results, you have an idea of the challenges I am discovering! :)

Finally, please keep an eye on your email as I will email weekly with the newest batch of reading and surveys. Since this is an interactive journal, my goal is to provide you with only

enough material that I think could reasonably fit into a one to two hour commitment in a week, either through short daily blocks or once a week. You will have to let me know how well I did at meeting this goal.

Thank you all again, I am so excited to hear your thoughts on what I hope is a bit of a different take on a leadership journal, and you find the contents to be not only interesting and engaging but meaningful as well.

Happy Journaling!

Chrystin McLelland

October 31, 2023