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AN INTRODUCTION TO SELF-LEADERSHIP

The Journey Begins

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- 1.1 Provide a basic definition of leadership.
- 1.2 Contrast the three primary sources of leadership: external leadership, participative leadership, and self-leadership.
- 1.3 Explain how we all lead ourselves.
- 1.4 Provide a basic definition of self-leadership.
- 1.5 Examine the concept of self-leadership in the context of social cognitive theory and intrinsic motivation theory.

“I can do it!” he shouted at the figure across the room. “All my life you’ve been holding me back, beating me down—I’ve had it! Why? Why can’t you let me be? I could be somebody,” he continued, now in a pleading voice.

For a while he was quiet except for the sound of his own deep breathing. He stared at what he now realized was his ultimate adversary. The figure was still; it said nothing. He sighed deeply and shifted his gaze away from the figure to the bright lights of the city below. Beginning to see the possibilities for his life, he felt a surge of excitement, of potential purpose, go through his every fiber.

He was lost somewhere in his imagination for what seemed several minutes. Suddenly reality hit him squarely and coldly again. His sense of possible escape was lost. He felt the chains weighing heavy on his soul. And he returned his gaze slowly, steadily, helplessly toward his oppressor. Once more he looked squarely into the eyes of the figure in the mirror before him.

This book will encourage you to “look into the mirror.” It emphasizes that we choose what we are and what we become. It recognizes that the world does not always cooperate with our goals but that we largely create the personal world with which we must cope. It also points out that we influence our own actions in countless ways, some of which we might not even recognize.

The world is experiencing an explosion in knowledge and technology. Artificial intelligence (AI), for example, is changing the way we process information and complete tasks. It is frightening to realize that what we learn often becomes obsolete in a short time. What doesn't change, however, is our need to deal effectively with this complex world and lead ourselves to fulfillment in life. If we can develop the ability to renew ourselves continually and overcome the obstacles on our way to life's exhilarations, we can become what we choose for ourselves.

LEADERSHIP

This book is not about leadership of others. Instead, it is about something more fundamental and more powerful—*self*-leadership. It is about the leadership that we exercise over ourselves. In fact, if we ever hope to be effective leaders of others, we need first to be able to lead ourselves effectively. To understand the process of self-leadership and how we can improve our capability in this area, it is useful first to explore the meaning of the term *leadership*.

Leadership has been defined and described in a seemingly endless number of ways—largely as a result of the work of the vast numbers of persons who have researched and written about the subject (and the equal vastness of their different viewpoints). One widely recognized name associated with the topic is that of Ralph M. Stogdill, who authored a handbook on leadership, published in 1974, that reviewed theory and research on the subject. Subsequently, that book was revised several times by Bernard M. Bass and Ruth Bass, most recently in 2008.¹ The book points out that leadership has been conceived of in many ways, including as the art of inducing compliance, a personality concept, a form of persuasion, a set of acts or behaviors, an instrument of goal achievement, an effect of group interaction, a differentiated role, and the exercise of influence. All of these descriptions have some merit. The most useful definition of leadership for our purposes—to focus on the idea of self-leadership—however, is simply that it is a process of influence for directing behavior toward accomplishing goals.² This short definition is a broad and meaningful one that recognizes the importance of human influence in determining what we are, what we do, and the complexity involved. (Influence takes place not as an isolated event but as a process involving many parts.)

The existing literature on leadership focuses almost universally on influence exercised by one or more persons over others (in other words, influence exercised by “leaders” on others). The first step in a journey toward an understanding and improvement of our own self-leadership is to recognize that leadership is not only an outward process; that is, we can and do lead ourselves.

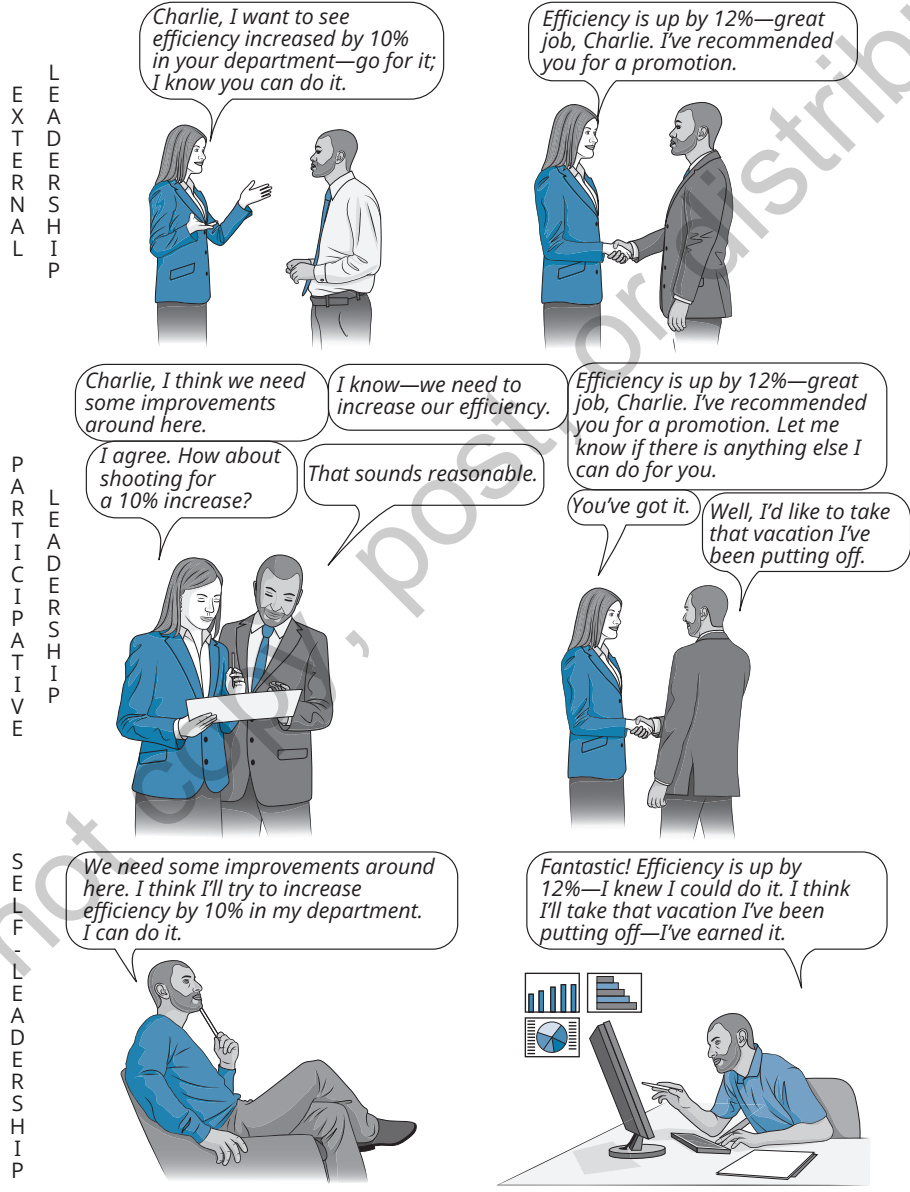
SOURCES OF LEADERSHIP

Leadership (the process of influence) can originate from a number of sources. The most commonly recognized source of leadership involves the influence that leaders exercise over their followers. This is also the most externally oriented view of leadership. It does not recognize the influence that we exercise over ourselves. An example of this external view is the giving of orders and the use of other methods of influence (such as rewards and punishments) by a formal organization manager over their followers.

Figure 1.1 is a pictorial representation of different sources of leadership. It depicts leadership as ranging from an entirely external influence process at one extreme to a self-imposed process

FIGURE 1.1 ■ Sources of Leadership

<p>BEFORE BEHAVIOR -----</p> <p>examples: setting goals giving orders encouragement expectations threats</p>	<p>BEHAVIOR -----</p>	<p>AFTER BEHAVIOR</p> <p>examples: <i>rewards</i> such as praise, money, promotion</p> <p><i>punishments</i> such as verbal reprimand, dismissal, demotion</p>
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at the other. The latter focus is the primary topic of this book. Between these two extremes, leadership influence comprises different combinations of external influence and self-influence. When a manager and a follower set a goal jointly, a participative leadership process is at work.

At this point, we are ready to take the next step of our journey—that is, the journey toward the realization that we do lead ourselves.

WE ALL LEAD OURSELVES

Even in the most highly controlled situations, we influence our own behavior in various ways. If you have a boss who gives you detailed orders and frequently checks your progress (and is not shy about letting you know what you're doing wrong), you still possess a great deal of discretion. The methods you use and the order in which you complete tasks, for example, are left to you. What you think about while you work is also up to you. If you choose to set a higher or lower personal goal for yourself than what your boss expects, that too is up to you. You can feel good about your progress or be tough on yourself for even the smallest of mistakes if you choose.

The point is that you are your own leader much of the time. Even if you are faced with influential external leaders, they are not likely to be staring over your shoulder every minute. In their absence, who is in charge? You are, of course. Even if they are present, they cannot look into your mind. In fact, we are our own ultimate leaders. We are capable of negating anything we hear externally and substituting our own internal communication. (From boss: "You're loafing, and what little work you *are* doing is poor quality." To self: "Everyone around here knows I'm the best worker in our department—obviously, the boss is being unreasonable today.")

Consider the following story:

On a construction site in the Southwest, when the lunch whistle sounded, all the workers would sit together to eat. Every day Joe would open his lunch pail and complain. "Gosh darnit," he'd cry, "not again—a bologna sandwich and corn chips." Day after day, week after week, Joe would moan and groan and say, "Not again—a bologna sandwich and corn chips."

Weeks passed, and other workers got tired of his complaining. Finally, one of Joe's fellow construction workers said, "C'mon, Joe, what's your problem? Every day you complain about your bologna sandwich and corn chips, so, for Pete's sake, who in the heck makes your lunches?"

Joe replied, "I do."

What this story suggests is that what we do with our lives, including where we work and for whom we work, is largely left to us. In other words, we make our own lunch. If we need more training to obtain the kind of job we want, it's up to us to lead ourselves to make the kinds of sacrifices necessary to achieve our ends. We are not saying that this is an easy process. In fact, leading ourselves to do what we want is difficult, but we can do it if we know how to go about it.

Belief in your ability to “make your own lunch”—that is, to lead yourself—can be a life-or-death matter. A substantial amount of research evidence suggests that work stress, which may be caused in part by feelings of little or no control at work, explains why rank-and-file employees appear to have a greater risk of coronary heart disease and all-cause mortality (as much as 50 percent higher) than do those in management and professional jobs.³ This book can provide you with the tools to lead yourself, to gain a feeling of more control in all aspects of your life, and thus to reduce your risk of experiencing such helpless feelings.

PROFILES IN SELF-LEADERSHIP

Condoleezza Rice

Condoleezza Rice is an excellent example of someone who has used self-leadership to overcome obstacles on the way to becoming an exceptional leader of others. Rice was the first African American woman (and only the second woman) to become U.S. secretary of state. She was also the first woman to serve as national security advisor and has held the position of provost at Stanford University. But her rise to such influential leadership roles was far from easy and presented many difficult challenges and failures along the way. Rice grew up in racially segregated Birmingham, Alabama, but from an early age her parents taught her that through hard work and determination, she could move beyond the difficult circumstances of her childhood environment. The family motto was “no victims, no excuses,” and her parents stressed that she would “have to be twice as good as everyone else to succeed in this world.”

Rice’s efforts to lead herself began at an early age. When she was only 3 years old, her parents gave her a toy piano with a limited range of keys that allowed her to play only certain songs. Before she turned 4, she asked her parents for a real piano. Her parents told her that if she could learn to play “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” perfectly, then they would get her a piano. She sat at her tiny piano for an entire day, practicing the song over and over. When her parents returned home from work that evening, she played the song flawlessly, and within a week, she had her piano.

Rice’s dream was to become a concert pianist. Through hard work and self-leadership, she was accepted as a piano major at the University of Denver. In her sophomore year, Rice participated in a piano recital in Aspen, where the level of talent was so high, she realized that if she continued on her current career track, she would end up “playing the piano in a department store,” as she later quipped. Despite her abilities to effectively lead herself, Rice was facing a major roadblock on her path to success. But as we will discuss in detail in Chapter 5, significant success often requires failure. Failure can provide opportunities to learn, grow, and possibly change directions if necessary. Rice returned to Denver looking for a new major. One day she found herself in an International Politics class taught by Soviet expert Josef Korbel. This experience kindled her interest in international affairs and launched her on a journey that would eventually lead to President George H. W. Bush introducing her to Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev by saying, “This is Condoleezza Rice. She’s my Soviet specialist. She tells me everything I need to know about the Soviet Union.” Through a combination of hard work, preparation, and self-leadership, Condoleezza Rice was able to overcome obstacles and failures on her way to becoming one of the most influential leaders of our time.

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Who provided the leadership for successful businesspeople like Bill Gates in founding Microsoft, Sir Richard Branson in building Virgin Group, Tory Burch in launching her self-titled lifestyle brand, or Toby Fox in developing the award-winning role-playing video games *Undertale* and *Deltarune*? Largely, leadership came from within for each of these world-famous visionaries. Tennis star Serena Williams provides an excellent example of leading from within. Over the course of her brilliant career, she won 23 Grand Slam singles titles, the most by any tennis player in the Open Era. Katrina Adams, president of the United States Tennis Association, has said, "Serena Williams is the ultimate champion. She knows what it takes to get to the top. She started at the bottom from Compton, worked her way up through the ranks of the professional tour to No. 1 in the world."⁴ How did Williams rise from her humble origins in the dangerous Los Angeles suburb of Compton to become one of the greatest female athletes of all time? Although many observers emphasize her physical presence, including her beauty, physical features, and fashion sense, others argue that her inner leadership—based on her mental strength and not her body—is her greatest attribute.⁵ As Williams herself has noted, "My game is my mental toughness. Just not only to be able to play, to win, but to be able to come back when I'm down. Both on the court and after tough losses, just to continue to come back and continue to fight, it's something that takes a lot of tenacity."⁶ Although leadership from external sources, including her father and her coaches, undoubtedly has had an impact on Williams's career, much of her success has resulted from her ability to lead herself.

SELF-LEADERSHIP RESEARCH

Does Self-Leadership Influence Individual Outcomes?

Nearly 40 years of self-leadership research says yes! Studies have consistently shown a relationship between self-leadership and a variety of individual outcomes, including job satisfaction, self-efficacy, creativity and innovation, and job performance. For example, one recent study found that self-leadership is related to higher levels of trust, potency,

commitment, and performance in geographically dispersed virtual research and development teams.⁷ In fact, two recent meta-analyses of self-leadership research found that self-leadership is positively related to individual outcomes, including creativity and innovation, self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and job performance, and that this relationship is moderated by a number of factors, including the type of outcome, the type of self-leadership, and cultural differences.⁸ Thus, the evidence suggests that self-leadership has impressive potential for improving performance.

As these examples and research findings help show, we all lead ourselves. This is not to say that we are all effective self-leaders. On the contrary, we all have weaknesses in our self-leadership process. In some people the process of self-leadership is dysfunctional. Many lead themselves into the wrong lines of work and into the wrong jobs; even more lead themselves into unhappiness and discontentment with their lives. Recent research has suggested that ineffective self-influence processes can result in destructive self-leadership. For example, a study involving 143 undergraduate students found that self-leadership, paradoxically, is positively related to *both* adaptive and maladaptive coping behaviors in students and that the negative effects of self-leadership on the students' anxiety levels through maladaptive coping behaviors is stronger than the positive effects of self-leadership through adaptive coping behaviors.⁹ These findings suggest that we shouldn't sit back and allow ourselves to engage in dysfunctional self-regulation. Rather, we should strive to proactively engage in positive and functional self-leadership processes and strategies to lead ourselves more effectively. Perhaps the saddest of all are those who give up much of their self-leadership potential to others and are led into equally negative conditions. The point is that you are your own leader, and like any leader you can be a good one or a bad one. In the pages that follow, we will attempt to help you understand your self-leadership patterns and how to improve them. The ideas you choose to adopt for yourself, however, are up to you. After all, you are your own leader.

SELF-LEADERSHIP

Building on the definition of leadership presented earlier in this chapter, self-leadership can best be described simply as the process of influencing oneself.¹⁰ This definition is general and does not provide the detail necessary to enable a better understanding or a more effective execution of the process. It does point out, however, the global target on which this book is focused—the process that we experience in influencing ourselves. As we will describe in greater detail throughout the remainder of the book, self-leadership is a comprehensive process of self-influence that involves specific behavioral and cognitive strategies. These strategies are designed to help us address not only *what* we need to do (e.g., determining the standards and objectives) but also *why* (e.g., strategic analysis) and *how* we should do it (e.g., strategic implementation). Therefore, effective self-leadership stresses the importance of reshaping behaviors, intrinsic motivation, and effective cognitive processes.¹¹

SELF-LEADERSHIP IN THE MOVIES

Rocky (1976)

Three scenes from the Academy Award–winning movie *Rocky* work well to provide an overview of the entire self-leadership process and why it is important. *Rocky* tells the story of an unknown amateur boxer who is given an opportunity to fight for the World Heavyweight Championship. The first scene begins (at approximately 54 minutes into the movie) with Rocky (Sylvester Stallone) entering Mr. Jergens’s office and presenting his card. Mr. Jergens explains that he is offering Rocky the opportunity to fight Apollo Creed for the championship. The second scene begins (at approximately 1 hour, 10 minutes) with Rocky’s alarm clock ringing at 4:00 A.M. and Rocky dragging himself out of bed to go for a training run. The scene ends with a discouraged and clearly out-of-shape Rocky panting for breath at the top of the steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The final scene—one of the iconic scenes in the movie—begins (at approximately 1 hour, 30 minutes) with the familiar theme “Gonna Fly Now” and shows Rocky engaging in forms of training in preparation for the fight. The scene ends with Rocky, now fit and in excellent condition, sprinting triumphantly to the top of the museum steps.

Discussion Questions

1. Does Rocky appear capable of reaching his goal of becoming heavyweight champion after the second scene?
2. Specifically, what does Rocky have to do to reach his goal?
3. How does Rocky motivate himself to accomplish his goal?
4. Who provides the influence or leadership to move Rocky to achieving his goal?
5. Does Rocky effectively lead himself?
6. What specific aspects of self-leadership does Rocky use to motivate himself to achieve his goal of becoming heavyweight champion?

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF SELF-LEADERSHIP

The concept of self-leadership is derived primarily from research and theory in two areas of psychology. The first, *social cognitive theory*, views the adoption and change of human behavior as a complex process with many parts.¹² It recognizes that we influence and are influenced by the world in which we live. We will expand on this idea in Chapter 2. Social cognitive theory places importance on the capacity of a person to manage or control themselves—particularly when faced with difficult yet important tasks. This viewpoint serves as the primary basis for Chapter 3. Social cognitive theory also recognizes the human ability to learn and experience tasks and events through vicarious and symbolic mechanisms—that is, by observing others and using imagination. Chapter 5 addresses these ideas. Finally, social cognitive theory stresses the importance of our perceptions of our own effectiveness or potential to be effective, a topic we examine in Chapter 8.

The second important area of knowledge for this book is that of *intrinsic motivation theory* (or, even more specifically, *self-determination theory*).¹³ This viewpoint emphasizes the importance of the “natural” rewards that we enjoy when we take part in activities or tasks that we like. The ideas included in the writings on intrinsic motivation focus on the potential we have to harness the motivational forces available when we do things that we enjoy. Chapter 4 addresses these ideas.

The knowledge offered by these two insightful theories concerning human behavior represents an important foundation for this book. We also borrow ideas from other bodies of knowledge, including motivation theory and leadership theory. Overall, this book will demonstrate the importance of the forces that we use to influence ourselves (often without being aware of them) and the potential we have to alter our worlds so that they are more motivating to us. At this moment, to help you visualize the concept of self-leadership and its application to your life, we ask you to ponder the following poem:

Leading the Band

He was going to be the President

Of the U.S. of A.

She was going to become an actress

In a Broadway play.

As youngsters—these were their dreams;

The visions they aspired to.

They truly thought these aspirations,

Eventually, would one day come true.

But he did not become President.

The reason is the ultimate sin.

He never ran for office.

He feared he would not win.

She didn't make it to New York City.

In fact, never set a foot on the stage.

She thought she'd forget her lines.

In other words—she was afraid.

The lesson in these stories

Is that you must get up and try.

If you let your fears control you,
Your dreams will quickly die.
Because if you want to hit a home run,
You have to go up to the plate.
If you want to meet that special person,
You have to ask them for a date.
The biggest crime in life
Is to forget what you have dreamt.
It's not the act of losing
But to have never made the attempt.
So as you battle with your fears in life,
Remember this brief command:
"If you're not afraid to face the music,
You may one day lead the band."¹⁴

In short, the goal of this book is to help you develop a framework that will enable you to motivate yourself to achieve your personal goals—to help you “lead the band” in your personal and professional lives. The journey has begun—lead onward.

Real-World Self-Leadership Case

Oprah Winfrey

Born into poverty to a single teenaged mother in a rural town in Mississippi, Oprah Winfrey overcame many challenges and obstacles in her life to become one of the most successful media moguls in history. As a child, she was abused by relatives and family friends. She was so poor that she often wore dresses made of potato sacks, which resulted in her being bullied at school. As a young teenager, she ran away from home, spent time in a juvenile detention center, and even considered suicide. “I did stupid things like drinking detergent and all that kind of crazy stuff that you do when you're trying to get attention when you're really just trying to cry for help,” she once explained in an interview. At the age of 14, Oprah was sent to live with her father and stepmother in Nashville, TN, and their positive influences helped her find a new purpose and direction for her life. “My father turned my life around, insisting I be more than I was and by believing I could be more,” she said. When she brough

home Cs on her report card, her father insisted that Cs were not acceptable because she was capable of doing better. Her stepmother took Oprah to the library each week, where she selected five books to read and write book reports that she submitted to her parents.

In school, Oprah excelled at speech and debate, which resulted in a full scholarship in communications at Tennessee State University and subsequently a job as the youngest female and first African American TV news anchor in Nashville. She then got a job in Baltimore as the coanchor of the evening news. However, when the newscast ratings failed to meet expectations, she was demoted to off-camera writing and told by her boss that she was “unfit for television.” Despite this humiliating failure, Oprah refused to give up. She took a close look at herself, and this increased self-awareness helped her realize she preferred human interest stories over simply reporting the news. This insight led her to cohost a talk show at her TV station called *People Are Talking*, and although some people may have viewed this as a step down from her primetime anchor role, Oprah saw it as an opportunity.

After a successful 5-year run with *People Are Talking*, Oprah was selected in a national search to host *Chicago A.M.*, which she took from last to first place in the ratings. In 1986, she launched her own nationally syndicated show. *The Oprah Winfrey Show* ran for 25 years with an average audience of 12–13 million people per day and remains the highest-rated daytime TV show of all time. During this time, Oprah won 46 Emmy Awards, including a lifetime achievement award, and was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress for her role in *The Color Purple*. She has launched her own television network, the Oprah Winfrey Network, and in 2013, President Barack Obama awarded her with the Presidential Medal of Freedom. She has interviewed a wide range of celebrities including Prince Harry and Megan Markle. Long known for her philanthropic efforts and her famous book club, Oprah was once voted the most popular and famous person in the United States.

Oprah explains that her successes stem from her ability to influence herself from within to find her purpose and calling in life. Even after her successes with *Chicago A.M.*, she felt that there was “something more” for her to accomplish that could only be identified through an increased self-awareness and connecting with her inner voice, which she calls her emotional GPS. “Every decision that has profited me has come from me listening to that inner voice,” Oprah said. “Everything that I have, I have because I let it be fueled by who I am. . . . I live a fantastic life. I live from the inside out.”

Questions for Class Discussion

1. Do you consider Oprah to be a leader? If so, in what ways?
2. What primary source of leadership did Oprah use to identify her purpose and accomplish her goals?
3. What types of external influences and obstacles did Oprah have to overcome?
4. In what ways is Oprah an effective self-leader?

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