

From:

Joanne B. Ciulla (editor), *Ethics: The Heart of Leadership*, 2nd edition.

Pages xv-xix.

Introduction

Some people become leaders because they develop or possess certain talents and dispositions, charisma, or passions, or because of their wealth, military might, job title, or family name. Others lead because they possess great minds and ideas or they tell compelling stories. And then there are those who stumble into leadership because of the times they live in or the circumstances in which they find themselves. No matter how people become leaders, no one is a leader without willing followers. Managers and generals may act like playground bullies and use their power and rank to force their will on people, but this is coercion, not leadership. Leadership is not a person or a position. It is a complex moral relationship between people, based on trust, obligation, commitment, emotion, and a shared vision of the good. Ethics is about how we distinguish between right and wrong, or good and evil in relation to the actions, volitions, and character of human beings. Ethics lie at the heart of all human relationships and hence at the heart of the relationship between leaders and followers. The essays in this volume explore the ethical complexities of leadership.

I dedicated this book to James MacGregor Burns because his theory of transforming leadership rests on the ongoing moral relationship of leaders and followers. In his book, *Leadership*, Burns describes transforming leadership as a relationship in which leaders and followers

morally elevate each other. Leadership for Burns is about change and sharing common purpose and values. The transforming leader helps people change for the better and empowers them to improve their lives and the lives of others.

In the foreword to this book, Burns laments that the authors in this volume do not make a crisp distinction between ethical and moral leadership, and that they fail to use the terms consistently. If you look up the words, you will see that ethics is defined as morals and morals as ethics. In ancient times the Romans translated the Greek word *ethikos* into the Latin word *morale*. In the foreword Burns' definitions of *ethical virtues*, *ethical values*, and *moral values* differ from the way other writers in this book define them; but rather than quibble over terms, let us look at what he means. For Burns, the values of moral leadership are those of the Enlightenment—liberty, equality, and community. This is a big-picture view of the ultimate ends of leadership. Most authors in this book probably believe in these ideals, just as they would agree that leaders should be honest, fair, and just. Nevertheless, in ethics, as with many other things, the devil is in the details. The essays in this book probe the details of the many aspects of ethics and leadership.

In the beginning, I said no one is a leader without willing followers. Most people agree that coercion is not leadership, but what is coercion and what is a willing follower? How do we draw the moral line between free will and subtle forms of manipulation, deception, and the pressure that group norms place on the individual? Similarly, few would argue with Burns' idea that the leadership relationship should be one that morally elevates both parties, but again, the details matter. Elevate from what to what? Who determines which moral values are better and what are the criteria for better values? What if people don't want to be elevated, or what if they incorrectly understand the common good? Authors in this collection treat these questions in different ways.

The essays in this book touch on three very general facets of ethics and leadership.

1. The ethics of the means: What do leaders use to motivate followers to obtain their goals? What is the moral relationship between leaders and followers?
2. The ethics of person: What are leaders' personal ethics? Are they motivated by self-interest or altruism?
3. The ethics of the ends: What is the ethical value of a leader's accomplishments? Did his/her actions serve the greatest good? What is the greatest good? Who is and isn't part of the greatest good?

These may all seem like obvious questions until you consider cases in which a leader is ethical in some of these areas but not others. For

example, some leaders may be personally ethical but use unethical means to achieve ethical ends; other leaders may be personally unethical, but use ethical means to achieve ethical ends, etc. This raises the question: Do leaders have to be ethical in all three areas to be ethical? Some might argue that the only thing that matters is what the leader accomplishes. Others might argue that the means and ends are ethically important, but the personal morality of a leader is not.

The chapters in this book look at ethics through different lenses. Four of the contributors are philosophers, four are distinguished leadership scholars with backgrounds in industrial and organizational psychology, and two are management scholars. Burns and all of the contributors in this book cast their ideas about ethics in slightly different terms.

Part one of the book provides two overviews of ethics and leadership, one from the perspective of leadership studies and one from business ethics. In the first chapter, I argue that a greater understanding of ethics will improve our understanding of leadership. Debates about the definition of leadership are really debates over what researchers think constitutes good leadership. The word *good* refers to both ethics and effectiveness. Some things have changed since I first wrote this chapter. There is more research on ethics and leadership today and, as illustrated by the other new additions to this book, leadership scholars have begun to pay more attention to ethics. Al Gini's essay explores the intersection of business ethics and leadership studies. He offers an excellent profile of the issues and literature in both fields. Gini emphasizes the role that "the witness of moral leadership" plays in improving the standards of business and everyday life.

Part two is about the relationship between leaders and followers. Noted leadership scholar Edwin P. Hollander takes us into the psychological and moral depths of leadership. He describes the leader-follower relationship as a unified interdependent relationship held together by loyalty and trust, and rooted in the leader's commitment to principles of justice, equity, responsibility, and accountability in the exercise of authority and power. Hollander examines the moral hazards of leaders who feel the need to maintain power and distance and become detached from how followers feel about them and their actions. He says that this pattern can be especially damaging to teamwork when leaders continue to receive disproportionate rewards despite their poor performance, especially when coupled with organizational downsizing and layoffs.

My chapter on "bogus empowerment" is about honesty and the distribution of power in the leader-follower relationship. Burns' theory of transforming leadership emphasizes the importance of morally improving followers so that they can lead themselves. This is a very good idea, but what does it really mean to give followers

power? And why is it so difficult for leaders to give people power? In the chapter I examine the failure of empowerment schemes in the workplace and argue that empowerment that attempts to change workers without changing leaders, and empowerment aimed at making people feel good but not at giving them resources and real discretion, are bogus. Authentic empowerment requires honesty and a full understanding of how the redistribution of power changes the leader-follower relationship.

Robert C. Solomon's chapter analyzes the role of emotions in the leader-follower relationship. He begins by exploding what he calls the myth of charisma. According to Solomon, charisma is not a quality of a leader's character, nor is it an essential element of leadership. He believes it is a general and "vacuous" way of talking about the complex emotional relationship of leaders to followers that is empty of moral content. He argues that trust is the emotional core of the leader-follower relationship and that we can better understand this relationship by looking at how the leaders and the led give trust to others.

The next part of this book is new. It describes the moral behavior of leaders. In it, Bruce J. Avolio and Edwin E. Locke debate whether a leader has to be altruistic to be ethical. Avolio makes the case that leaders who are altruistic are ethical, and they are successful *because* they are altruistic. Locke, a professor and senior writer for the Ayn Rand Institute, argues that altruistic leaders are unethical and that ethical leaders should be self-interested. Terry L. Price's article takes a different view of leaders' ethics and intentions. He believes that the moral behavior of leaders goes beyond the motives of altruism and self-interest. He says that the moral failures of leaders are usually cognitive. According to Price, leaders consciously act in unethical ways because power and position lead them to believe that they are not bound by the requirements of morality. His paper examines the intellectual challenges of leadership that make leaders susceptible to ethical failure.

The last part of the book is about the conflicts between leaders and groups of followers over what constitutes the common good. Popular media, communitarian writers, and recent management literature suggest that communities and organizations are rife with social interest groups who pursue their own selfish interests without regard for the common good. Burns and other scholars believe transformational leadership offers a solution to this problem because it refocuses people's attention on higher goals and collective interests. Michael Keeley thinks this is a dangerous solution, one that James Madison and the Constitutional Convention of 1787 sought to thwart. Using examples from the organizational literature as well as history, Keeley argues that it is better to accommodate factions and individual interests by building them into the leader-follower relationship. For Keeley, a system of checks and

balances is morally better than transforming people so that they share the same higher collective goals. In his essay, Keeley explains the implications of this approach for leadership in organizations and political theory. In another new addition to the book, Bernard M. Bass and Paul Steidlmeier defend transformational leadership from Keeley and other critics. This is an important essay because in it, Bass changes one feature of his theory on transformational leadership. In his earlier work, Bass' theory was morally neutral. Transformational leaders could be good or evil. In this chapter, Bass and Steidlmeier argue that only ethical leaders are authentic transformational leaders. Self-aggrandizing and immoral leaders are pseudo-transformational leaders. By the end of Bass and Steidlmeier's chapter, the differences between Bass' transformational theory and Burns' transforming leadership theory seem significantly narrower than they were in the past. The argument that only ethical leaders are really transformational raises a whole new set of questions. Once again, the devil is in the details.

What is clear from this book is that the morality of leadership depends on the particulars of the relationship between people. It matters who the leaders and followers are and how well they understand and feel about themselves and each other. It depends on whether leaders and followers are honest and trustworthy, and most importantly what they do and what they value. Behind all of these things are broad philosophic questions such as: What is the common good? Do people have free will? How should we treat one another? These are eternal questions that have kept generations of leaders and thinkers up late at night. This book probes what the answers to these questions mean for today's leaders. They offer the reader hands-on insights into the ethical dynamics that make the heart of leadership tick.