

FOREWORD

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Out of the blue, one day in October of 2006, an Australian who said he was writing a book on leadership contacted me. He said he had discovered my own book *The Power of Collaborative Leadership: Lessons for the Learning Organization*. I co-authored this book with JoAnne O'Brien-Levin (formerly Wyer) and Bert Frydman. The caller said he thought that he and I shared some common ground, and he was wondering whether I would be willing to take a look at what he had written so far and give him feedback. The caller was Don Dunoon, the author of this book.

In this first call, Don described to me the general thrust of his book. He told me that his approach to leadership, which he has been developing and testing for years, challenged some basic premises. Namely, he questioned the prevailing assumption that leadership can only be done by people whom others see as leaders, by virtue of their personal characteristics or qualities. He also challenged other commonly-held ideas: that leadership is the province of only those in authority; that leadership is based on influence; and that it is a waste of time to tease out any distinction between leadership and management.

Don talked about leadership as grounded in learning (rather than influence), and as something very distinct from management.

As to my own background, I had been involved with Learning Organization concepts since the early 1990s. I had worked closely with Peter Senge, first as the president of a company committed to weaving Organizational Learning tools into the fabric of the organization in order to deal more effectively with business issues, and later as the president of the Society of Organizational Learning, which emerged out of the Organizational Learning Center of MIT. Because of the resonance with my own background, I was greatly intrigued by what Don said. The fact that I had also co-authored a book on leadership based on Organizational Learning tools further underscored my interest in Don's work.

This is how our relationship began. With time, I had the opportunity to read the material in his book as he was developing it. I gave him my commentary, and discussed with him some potential implications of his work.

Having read many books on leadership I can say that Don's book is different in many ways. He has set out to think about leadership as a process and has introduced in this book a new concept of leadership that is distinctive and, importantly,

separate from management. He has identified a new “species” of leadership, which he terms learning-centered leadership, and talks about this form of leadership as being expressed through specific, in-the-moment interventions. When people make these interventions, they are acting “in the leadership mode.” Don makes a distinction between actions we take in the leadership mode and those we take when we are in what he calls the “management mode.” He argues that leadership-mode action is important because the management mode is inadequate for helping people face and overcome the contentious problems that confound most organizations. His argument is that in most organizations the management mode dominates, and this dominance hampers efforts to deal with such problems. Through various “case stories” he illustrates the need for one mode as opposed to the other.

In spite of the fact that many scholars and other authors talk about learning as a process that improves one’s leadership, the characterization of leadership Don introduces is novel. I have not seen anything like it in any other book on leadership. Reading Don’s book truly opened my eyes relative to my own leadership style, particularly with respect to the ways in which I went about my work as president of Philips Display Components. While I was introducing the tools and methods of Organizational Learning into the organization I was certain that I had opened the doors for others in the company to, as Don puts it, practice learning-centered leadership. Only after reading Don’s book did I realize the mistakes I made as I attempted to walk this new path. I am strongly recommending this book to all those who are serious about making positive and lasting changes in their way of leading.

In this book Don also introduces a set of practices and tools to help practitioners apply the new concepts. The overall framework goes by the name ARIES, which is an acronym for each of the learning-leadership practices: attending, reflecting, inquiring, expressing, and synthesizing. At one level, Don sees these as practices; by working with them, people can progressively develop their capability, for performing learning-centered leadership work. At another level, ARIES is a set of pragmatic tools that we can use to help us deal with contentious problems.

Laying the groundwork for a new, groundbreaking view of leadership—as well as providing practitioners with a toolkit—is no small task. The book must cover a lot of ground, so there is quite a bit of material. To make it easier for the reader, the book is divided into two parts: Part 1 lays out the argument for a new view of leadership, and so is more conceptual. Part 2 introduces the ARIES practices and tools, and shows their practical application. As Don points out in the book’s introduction, the reader can choose what to focus on depending on his or her interests. I would personally suggest that those who are interested in a new way of defining leadership should spend a lot of time reading and reflecting on Part 1. Those in

organizations needing change would benefit most from examining the practices and tools in Part 2, and thinking about how they might use them to regenerate leadership based on Don's definitions.

As a leader myself, and also as an individual who has studied and written a book on leadership, I found reading both parts to be beneficial, though I was drawn more to Part 2. In any case, throughout the book Don has pointed out how to best use the material for one's benefit. He has also supplied summaries at the end of each chapter. The summaries describe very well the material dealt with in each chapter in an abridged form. If the reader is interested in acquiring an overview before delving in, this is a good way to start.

In summary, I believe this book will add a substantial amount of new knowledge to the field of leadership. This new knowledge is important and necessary if we are to improve upon the current state of leadership in organizations, and to make them more successful in the future.

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