

A "Curated" List of Leadership Articles From Academic Impressions

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February 2017

Over the past 7-8 years, Academic Impressions has designed and delivered leadership programs for over a thousand leaders across the higher education landscape. We have had the opportunity to work with academic and administrative leaders as well as presidents and provosts. The learning experiences have been outstanding because almost every participant was *curious* about learning about leadership, not pontificating about it.

One of the protocols we use in every leadership program is the creation of a "*Learning Agenda*" that is produced by participants and is a list of highly relevant articles, books, and papers on leadership. The "criteria" for making it on the learning agenda list is that the suggestions must be something that influenced a participant, made them think differently about how they view leadership or had a positive and meaningful impact on how they actually lead. Participants populate the list as the programs emerge over a 2 or 3-day period. They also provide a 1-minute snapshot about the suggested books or articles with a brief rationale about why their suggestions are worth reading.

As you would imagine, we tend to get great information that is shared with everyone in the leadership program. This short paper is an annotated list of some of the strong recommendations from past participants and many of which we utilize in our current programs. There is a lot of blather and clutter out there regarding leadership; these curated suggestions are a leadership gift. We hope you find the suggestions helpful

We are sharing the list with you for two primary reasons: One is to help you in your own leadership *learning* journey, the second reason is to request that you send us some of your own suggested articles, papers and books for our review. We want to hear from you what you think would be valuable papers and articles for us to consider using in our leadership programs and *most importantly* to share your suggestions with the Academic Impressions

leadership "family".

If you send us a some suggestions, we promise to read them carefully, provide you with feedback about their potential contributions and when we publish the suggestions in future curated lists, we will attribute your suggestions so that your colleagues can see who has been helpful with their learning journey.

The following suggestions are all great articles, but in the future, we anticipate sharing both important academic papers and books with you.

1) **Fair Process.** W.Chan Kim & Rene'e Mauborgne, Harvard Business Review, January 2003. the authors of this article are from the *Blue Ocean* fame, (*which is a counterintuitive way of not competing in the current marketplace but creating your own market, and definitely worth a read*) The main leadership theme to consider from this article is the power of the "process", or *how* things are done. They found that people care deeply about the decisions that are made that impact/influence their lives, but they care *even more* about the process used along the way.

People can commit to a leaders or manager's decision, *even one they disagree with*, if they believe that the process used was fair. This is one of the most powerful notions in organizational leadership; the process does matter and when conducted with transparency and honesty, can build institutional trust. This guiding principle will be even more important to consider as higher education moves toward a complex and ambiguous future.

2) **Change or Die!** Alan Deutschman, Fast Company, December 19, 2007. Beyond the provocative title is some excellent advice for all leaders. The article (*there is also a book by the same author*) is primarily about how very difficult it is to actually change things. One of the powerful ideas the author shares is about heart attack patients who survive their severe "incident" (*50% of heart attack patients die!*) and their openness to change their current lifestyle, after their attack.

When their physician tells them that they need to lose weight, or start to exercise, or quit smoking, only one in nine will actually change their health habits. And this is after surviving a near fatal heart attack! One in Nine.

So when leaders talk about change efforts on their campus, leave the platitudes at home, and realize that it is very difficult to really change things. It is a hard and long journey, and thankfully the author suggests some effective strategies for leaders to consider as they endeavor to create meaningful change on their campus

3) **Beware the Busy Manager.** Heike Bruch & Sumantra Ghoshal, Harvard Business Review, (2002) This is one of our favorite articles of all time, and can be a humbling read. The authors' look at the "*Buckets of Sweat*" syndrome, that many leaders get caught in and the pervasive busyness that tends to live throughout our campuses. Almost everyone feels overwhelmed as the pace of change accelerates, the question is, how do we stop the "urgency" train?

The authors did extensive research on how people *actually* spend their time, and found that most of are "busy" but not very productive. They also provide some strategies for the reader to consider that can free us from this insidious dynamic that costs us our health, money and happiness.

4) **The Set up to Fail Syndrome**, Jean- Francois Manzoni & Jean - Louis Barsoux (1998) Harvard Business Review. Don't be fooled by the date of this article, it is as timely today and it was when it was written almost 20 years ago. The author's unpack a powerful dynamic that we often hear about in our programs when participants talk about "poor performers" back on their campuses. The main theme of this article makes them think about their own role with poor performers.

The author's discuss the opposite of the Pygmalion effect where a person lives *up* to great expectations, and describes a dynamic where the subordinate lives *down* to the low expectations of their boss. The "*set up to fail*" syndrome begins with the boss and the subordinate in a positive or at least

neutral relationship. Then something "negative" happens (e.g. an important deadline missed; submitting a poor proposal or paper) and the boss loses faith in the subordinate. Their reaction to this event is to more closely supervise their person, give lots more "advice" and directions, give them less challenging projects and get involved more with their decision making.

The subordinate takes this added scrutiny as a lack of trust and confidence in them, and begin to emotionally withdraw. The process ends up paralyzing the employee into inaction and self-protection. It becomes a self-fulfilling and self-reinforcing cycle, as their relationship spirals downward.

Fortunately, the authors offer some practical advice for the leader to turn this insidious dynamic around. It is not an easy journey once the downturn begins, but there is hope.

5) Creativity and the Role of the Leader Teresa M. Amabile & Mukti Khaire (2008) Harvard Business Review. Almost everything Teresa Amabile writes is golden, and teaches us all about the vital role of creativity in our organizations. If higher education is to meet the relentless challenges it faces, developing the creativity of our people will be an essential factor for success going forward.

Amabile, tells us that you can not "manage" creativity, but you can manage *for* it. She suggests that leaders open their organizations to diverse perspectives by getting people together to share their expertise and perspectives. It is important for leaders to create a culture where it is safe to fail *and learn from it*. She also provides some strategies on how to prevent our bureaucratic institutions and organization from squeezing creativity to death with too many policies, protocols and procedures. She also identifies the appropriate role of criticism and rigor in the creative process (*hint: it doesn't come into play in the very beginning of idea generation*)

The biggest takeaway for leader reading this article might be the notion that diversity enhances creativity, this is not a platitude, but a research based claim. The role of the leader then, is to create the opportunity for people of different disciplines, backgrounds and area of expertise to share their

thinking with each other. When that happens, creative "magic" can result in powerful, even dramatic ways. Remember, senior leaders don't have to be the "creative ones", but they do need to create the conditions for creativity to flourish.

6) **How Resilience Works.** Diane Coutu, (2002) HBR. Coutu was one of the first writers to discuss the notion of "resilience" and why it is very important for leaders to possess this ability to "*bounce back*" from challenges and crisis

She identifies 3 primary characteristics of resilient leaders: 1) They have a staunch acceptance of reality (*they don't sugar coat the potential risks and pain a current & difficult situation holds.*) They tell it like it is.

2) They have a clear sense of Purpose and Meaning. They believe that their life and work serves a higher purpose and that they have a contribution to make in the world and with people. This purpose enables them to endure great difficulty even pain, because it is part of the leadership journey. 3) They have an uncanny ability to improvise. They take whatever they have (*at times very little*) and make do with it. They don't spend time complaining about what they don't have. They creatively move forward, and adapt to circumstances along the way.

She shares many lessons and strategies for leaders to utilize as they build their own resiliency "*muscles*".

Note: A great book "*Resilience: Why things Bounce Back*" (2012), by Andrew Zolli, is an excellent resource for those who want to deeply understand the complexity and importance of resilience.

7) **A Survival Guide for Leaders** ((2002) Ronald Heifetz & Marty Linsky (HBR). These two academics from Harvard understand the challenges and complexities of leadership like no others. They have also written some books together and are highly recommended reading. They were among the first theorists to bring the idea of "*Adaptive Change*" to the leadership dialogue. An adaptive change is very different than a "technical" change, because an adaptive change has no clear answers, and is full of ambiguity and complexity. It tests a leader's abilities to take risks, apply creative, even risky

approaches to challenges and learn how to “fail forward” and constantly learn you go.

They see leadership as a hazardous and challenging journey that will test the mettle of any leader. One of their more powerful quotes is: “*To Lead, is to Live Dangerously*”. They tell us that leaders personal self-care is important and finding a “sanctuary” for renewal and refreshment is an essential strategy for all leaders.

They describe some counterintuitive notions like: Leaders simply don’t have all the answers, but need to develop the capacity of their people to take on their own organizational challenges, and not defer to the leader; the importance for leaders to “*manage their hungers*” like the need for control and power and the desire for self importance. We all have them, but we need to manage them carefully, if we are to avoid being consumed by them

These authors provide powerful and realistic strategies for leaders to consider as they manage the “enduring white water” of higher education. These guys make you really think.

8)The Failure Tolerant Leader. (2002) Richard Farson & Ralph Keyes (20 HBR. The authors have written a provocative and counterintuitive article (*they also have a book*) about the benefits of “failure”. They have found that effective leaders and very successful organizations have found that failure is an essential part of the organizational learning process. Effective leaders see failure as a *resource* that they can learn from, not something to be avoided at all costs.

Rather than hide our mistakes, if we have the courage to look at them and distill the lessons embedded within them, we can become much smarter over time. Mistakes are an inevitable and a natural part of leadership. Distilling the lessons learned from them and sharing them widely throughout an organization, can leverage the talent in our organizations in powerful ways.

When people aren’t afraid to admit mistakes and don’t try to cover them up,

everyone benefits from their experience. This creates what Peter Senge and his colleagues would call a “learning organization”, which can give an organization a powerful competitive edge in the marketplace of ideas

9) Embracing Confusion. (2005) Jerome Murphy & Barry Jentz (Phi Delta Kappan). This excellent monograph is another “counterintuitive” notion that goes against many leaders’ natural instincts. Most of us avoid “confusion” at all costs, because leaders aren’t “*supposed*” to be confused or not have all the answers. The authors explore the theme of the “lost leader syndrome”, where leaders face uncertain and complex situations that simply do not make any sense. Unable to discern a clear direction forward or next steps, they often become confused, disorientated, even “lost”.

This confusion has nothing to do with the leader’s intelligence or ability because the world is full of change, complexity and “adaptive” challenges, where the answers simply aren’t apparent. When most leaders get confused, they see it as a liability to be avoided at all costs, but Murphy & Jentz see confusion as a “resource” to be understood! They have created a disciplined 5-step process, which they call Reflective Inquiry and Action, where the leader walks through a process that enables them to travel from confusion to clarity. One of the most provocative and relevant articles we have read.

10) The Seduction of the Leader in Higher Education (201??) Patrick Sanaghan & Kimberly Eberbach. *Academic Impressions*. These authors discuss a pervasive and often destructive leadership dynamic, where leaders, *especially* senior leaders, do not get honest feedback about their leadership effectiveness, because people will not tell them the truth. This does not mean that people aren’t honest and honorable; it just is difficult to “speak truth to power”.

There are several reasons for this: People often have a reverence & respect for senior leaders (e.g. President, Provost); the collegial nature of higher education prevents people from telling it like it is; People have experienced how a leader negatively responds to difficult feedback or information, and they don’t like what they see; people don’t want to lose their “seat at the table” so they go along to get along and avoid being “disinvited” to important

meetings. The reasons are many, so every leader needs to be vigilant about the seduction dynamic because it *never goes away*,

The authors make some powerful and practical suggestions about how to avoid the "seduction" dilemma (e.g. engage in a 360-degree feedback process; actively seek the input of others with important decisions,) that will help manage the seduction dynamic and provide access to information few leaders ever receive.

We hope that you find these suggested articles helpful in your leadership journey. Please provide us with both feedback about these articles, and please suggest some of your own. Good luck!