

**FOREWORD BY MARSHALL GOLDSMITH**

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THE  
**INSPIRING**  
LEADER

UNLOCKING THE SECRETS  
OF HOW EXTRAORDINARY  
LEADERS MOTIVATE

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*Chapter 1*

Inspiration: The Most  
Important Leadership  
Ingredient

*The essence of leadership is that you can't blow an uncertain trumpet.*

—Theodore M. Hesburgh

*Leadership is based on a spiritual quality, the power to inspire others to follow.*

—Vince Lombardi

Anyone who has worked in an organization for even a few years has witnessed a similar event. A group whose performance was flat and lackluster gets a new leader. Suddenly there's an excitement in the air. People are smiling. Productivity soars. What exactly makes this happen? Can more leaders learn to do this?

This book explains to leaders what they must do in order to bring about extraordinary performance by those they manage. It explains what is required to move a group that has been rather ho-hum to a state of being gung-ho. It tells what leaders do that breaks through the barrier of "just-get-by" mediocrity and enables them to lead their team to newfound heights of higher performance and profitability. It does this by focusing on an ingredient of leadership that has, for a variety of reasons, largely been ignored.

Books on leadership have invariably made the assumption that somehow leaders were able to influence the performance of their subordinates. However, depending on which book you read, the underlying reasons for that influence have been extremely varied.

For example, each book would attribute the result to a different factor, such as these:

- Brilliant strategic thinking
- Superb execution
- The leader's passion and strong drive for results
- Technical brilliance and innovation
- Strong interpersonal skills
- Nobility of character
- Being a good problem solver

The list goes on and on, given the thousands of books on the subject.

Yet, always in the background has been the recognition that part of the results that the leader produced may be coming from some poorly defined and described “secret sauce.” In the past this has frequently been identified as “charisma.” Somehow this ingredient was always recognized as being in the equation, but by its very nature, it seemed impossible to describe.

### **HOW IS THIS BOOK DIFFERENT?**

Thousands of books have been written on the topic of leadership, and much of what is said comes from an opinion that gains popularity or the success stories of a single successful leader. This book is neither. We approach the topic of inspiration and motivation from an analytical perspective, using research methods with statistically significant data and objective empirical evidence regarding what makes a leader inspiring. As a result, this book is not a creation of ideas for how leaders inspire. Rather, it provides you with a discovery of what the best leaders around the world do to inspire and motivate others.

After all, what are leaders to do when they consider that their job requirements are to achieve financial objectives, meet organizational or divisional goals, implement changes, and manage teams of people, and while they are doing that, their bosses tell them to be sure to be inspirational and motivating?

The message of this book can be summed up this way. Leadership is very complex. It is made up of many components, several of which we've just noted. Like a wonderful dish served by a world-class chef, it has many ingredients that make it so delicious. While much has been written about many of the key ingredients, there is one that has received little attention, and yet it is the one that our research suggests is the most important.

The question, "What makes an outstanding leader?" has been asked many times. Our approach to attempting to find a valuable answer to that question came from having an extensive database that consisted of more than 200,000 multirater or 360-degree feedback instruments that described 20,000 managers. For several data sets inside that large database, we had company performance measures. This enabled us to identify those who received the highest aggregate scores and compare them with those who scored less well. By doing this, we were able to identify those competencies that most powerfully differentiated these different groups. Thus, our approach was empirical rather than clinical.

As time went on, we were frequently asked to identify which of these competencies was the "silver bullet" that made the greatest difference. It became increasingly clear that one of them, "*inspires and motivates to high performance*," was the single most important quality or competency for the leader to possess. But let us reiterate: this does not mean that the other elements of leadership are not important. They can't be ignored.

This book will focus on the ingredient that has mostly been brushed over and forgotten. We'll attempt to explain why that may have happened, but beyond that, we will attempt to analyze it in a way that makes sense to the intelligent layman. Our most important objective, however, is to provide specific suggestions about how every leader can acquire more of this attribute.

This book is not completely unique in its focus on inspiration or charisma.<sup>1</sup> Others have alluded to this ingredient, but we come at this topic from a different perspective. We bring an empirical, analytical approach to this subject that would seem more likely to be

applied by a poet or novelist. Our objective will be to demystify it and take it from the realm of an intangible, indefinable quality to something that can be studied and then put into practice. Our desire is to help leaders understand how they can better develop this quality and immediately put it to work in their daily leadership behavior.

### WHY WE CHOSE THIS TOPIC

First, why did we choose this topic? The short answer is that after doing research for our earlier book, *The Extraordinary Leader*, we continued to analyze those competencies that were most powerful in separating extraordinary leaders from all the others. We had often been asked, “So if I have to choose one thing to work on, what should it be?” For a considerable time we avoided answering that question, because there were many leadership competencies that our research showed to be important. The easiest answer was the classic, “It depends.” What people choose to work on should depend on their job, the company culture, the organization’s strategic direction, their passion, and their interests.

As time went on, however, our research revealed that there was one leadership competency that deserved some special attention. It was “inspires and motivates to high performance.” Three distinct pathways each led to this same conclusion.

1. First, our research showed “inspires and motivates to high performance” to be the most powerful predictor of someone’s being seen as an extraordinary leader. From a field of 16 such competencies, this one clearly stood out.

The specific measures that we used to describe this characteristic and that most powerfully made that separation of best and worst leaders were the following:

- a. “Inspires others to high levels of effort and performance.”<sup>©</sup>
  - b. “Energizes people to achieve exceptional results.”<sup>©</sup>
2. Next, when the subordinates of tens of thousands of leaders were directly asked what leadership competency they most

wanted to have in their leader, their resounding first choice was “inspires and motivates to high performance.”

3. Finally, when we measured employee commitment and engagement in organizations and analyzed what leadership behaviors were most associated with the highest levels of employee commitment, “inspires and motivates” again was the competency at the top of the list. It was consistently the most highly correlated with those employees who would recommend the organization to a friend, seldom thought about leaving, and were willing to go the extra mile.

We’re not suggesting that there is a single “silver bullet” for leadership. But the ability of leaders to inspire those about them comes the closest to being that all-powerful solution. We simply cannot overemphasize how robust and dominant it is.

### **WHY MOTIVATION MATTERS**

The authors have backgrounds that on the face of it would seem to make it unlikely that they would write a book on inspiration. Why? Because inspiration is a topic that most people see as “soft” and “mysterious,” and nothing in our past work experience would point in this direction. In addition to that, our past research interests would also make us unlikely candidates for this topic.<sup>2</sup> We have a reputation for taking an empirical, relatively hard-nosed view of leadership and how leaders can best be developed. We insist on showing the business case for what we recommend. Frankly, in the past we gravitated away from the “touchy-feely” activities that were prevalent in our profession and favored the well-researched behavioral approach to developing leaders. We insist on doing only those things that have been proven to have a positive impact and really work.

Yet the reason we chose this subject is embedded in what has just been said. We could no longer simply ignore the topic just because it seems so hard to define or implement. That’s a rather cowardly thing to do. Nor could we brush it under the carpet on the grounds that it is just too “squishy.” That fact did not dissuade highly

esteemed research psychologists like Martin Seligman from studying “happiness” or “optimism.”

The compelling force that we could not escape was the simple fact that the data led us here. The empirical evidence confirms that there is a powerful dimension of leadership that strongly influences all leaders’ performance and that had been evaded for far too long. It could be described as leadership development’s “elephant on the table.” You can pretend it isn’t there, but everyone strongly suspects or knows it is there, despite the fact that few want to talk about it.

### **IS THIS BOOK FOR YOU?**

This book is written for leaders in business, public-sector organizations, health-care institutions, and educational institutions. The conclusions are as relevant to long-established manufacturing companies as they are to a recent high-tech start-up. While the underlying data from which these conclusions are drawn come largely from North America, we have conducted enough studies in Latin America, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia-Pacific countries to be comfortable that these conclusions apply globally. Despite how much has been written about how different generations respond to leaders, our research showed no discernible conclusions indicating differences between baby boomers and the younger Gen-Xers, Gen-Yers, Millennials, or Nexters in this matter of how leaders inspire. It is cross-generational.

The only difference between “inspires and motivates to high performance” and what is more broadly described as influence is the target audience. In this book, we focus on the relationship of leaders with those who report to them, but exactly the same concepts and principles can apply to any individual’s relationship with peers, customers, and suppliers. Furthermore, beyond working relationships inside organizations, we submit that these findings are relevant to anyone who is attempting to influence other people in any situation. Therefore, these findings can be helpful to Boy and Girl Scout leaders, not-for-profit organizations, volunteer leaders, and mothers and fathers.

### A QUICK EXERCISE

Think of your own experience with different leaders with whom you've interacted. It should be easy to identify those who were basically competent and effective. In the left-hand column, under the heading "Competent Leader," jot down the names of three leaders whom you've known well. Choose three who were competent but not extraordinary. Choose ones who were technically competent, smart, and hard-working and who kept the organization's interests above their own. Let's assume that your list of competent leaders represents people with no major defects. Chances are that these people gave clear direction, followed up on assignments, were considerate of others, and acted with integrity. They were competent, but there was no inspiration. Typically, people respond to this kind of leader by doing their jobs and completing their assignments, but they don't do much extra.

#### Competent Leader

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#### Extraordinary Leaders

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Then, under the heading "Extraordinary Leaders," contrast those leaders with three others who truly inspired you. Think of people whose leadership caused you to put forth extra effort, to be extremely creative, and to be doggedly persistent. Think of when work felt like it was a "cause" or a "calling," and you smile when you think about it. In the right-hand column, list those three leaders who inspired you to perform at your peak.

These leaders somehow motivated you to do more than you expected you could. Whatever you were doing seemed like a "cause," rather than a job or an assignment. Work was something that you wanted to do rather than something that you *had* to do. You were clear about your goals, and you had a burning desire to be

successful. Those around you were also caught up in the excitement. Everyone was working hard to make something important happen.

There is a dramatic difference between the two experiences. We've noticed that people invariably smile when they talk about their experience with the leaders in the right-hand column. They seldom smile when they talk about their experience with those on the left. Adequate leaders get everyone to do their jobs, but inspirational leaders are able to get people to rise far above that mark and achieve more. They perform better on an individual basis, and the team they work in performs better as well.

Now think about your current situation. Which describes the kind of leadership that you provide? If you have subordinates, do they consistently go the extra mile? Do they take complete responsibility, act with optimism and enthusiasm, bounce back when things go poorly, and in general act like owners rather than hired hands? Do people laugh and appear to be having a good time at work?

If you would like to have more of that behavior from the people who report to you, then we invite you to read on. We think you will find some valuable ideas about making that happen.

### **WHY WE'VE AVOIDED THIS TOPIC IN THE PAST**

We think there are many reasons why this topic of “charisma” or “inspiration” has been skirted for so long.

1. It is hard to define and quantify.
2. It is on the “softer” side of the so-called soft skills.
3. It has not been clear that there were measurable business consequences.

Let's explore each of these reasons briefly.

#### **Inspiration Is Hard to Define and Quantify**

The word *inspiration* literally means “putting life into something that had been lifeless.” It is the concept involved in the biblical account of God putting spirits into the bodies of Adam and Eve in

order that they might have life. While many books have been written about motivation, little has been written about inspiration. Even less has been written that is based on any research. That's what we believe separates the information in this book from much of what you might have read in the past. Fortunately, some good researchers have begun to explore the topic. We're grateful to them because their work begins to provide some answers.

We have also associated this dimension of inspirational leadership with the term *charisma*. It has been a catchall phrase to describe all those qualities and behaviors that could not be defined and measured, but that obviously had a strong impact on the results that a leader produced. *Charis* means "grace" or "gift" in Greek, and it has come to be associated with a special gift or power displayed by a leader. The sociologist Max Weber described it as "a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities."<sup>3</sup> For more than 60 years, astute observers have noted this unique dimension of leaders, but it has been left in the category of questions that someone jokingly described as "too hard."

Be aware that we will use the terms *charisma* and *inspiration* somewhat interchangeably as we go forward. Based on our analysis, they seem extremely close to each other. We realize that some think of charisma as being a broad collection of qualities that creates a leader's influence. However, the same can be said of inspiration. Some may think of inspiration as being a bit narrower and linked to specific actions. We've chosen to make them virtually equal.

Together the terms *inspiration* and *charisma* feel as if they are in the same category as the word *pornography*. We have all heard the classic comment by Judge Black, who acknowledged: "I can't define it, but I can recognize it when I see it." That's how most have approached charisma and inspiration, and this is where we seem to be at the moment.

### **It Is on the “Softer” Side of the So-Called Soft Skills**

Possibly because it has been hard to define, social scientists have shied away from motivation as a topic for analysis on the grounds that if the topic of interpersonal skills was a soft subject, this was simply over the top. A few academics have attempted to define it, but virtually no progress has been made on how to develop it.<sup>4</sup> Until recently, any work done in the way of practical attempts to help leaders develop these qualities has been in the hands of people from the world of drama and acting<sup>5</sup> or that of presentation skills training.

This topic switches from the more cognitive, rational, and potentially empirical analysis of observable behavior over to another side. It is now in the realm of emotions, feelings, affect, and energy. It is a territory where many of us begin to squirm and become extremely uncomfortable. Yes, most of us can intellectually acknowledge that feelings are important, but the traditional businessperson tends to leave that world for the actors, artists, singers, poets, and painters to tend. It is a realm that we don't pretend to understand well, let alone know how to help others develop. Most students of leadership dimly see it and acknowledge its importance, and it is into that world that we will attempt to usher you. It is also the world into which we hope to bring more light.

### **It Has Not Been Clear That There Were Measurable Business Consequences**

When dealing with groups of executives, we have been surprised by the number who don't see much of a direct link between leadership effectiveness and organizational performance. We don't have precise data on this question, but it seems as if about 40 percent of the leaders we encounter don't see that direct linkage between leadership and business results. The good news is that the majority see the connection. The telling fact, however, is this: if the business impact of overall leadership excellence is not clear, then it is very clear that a leader's ability to inspire others would not be seen as having powerful business consequences.

## HOW THE REST OF THE BOOK IS ORGANIZED

Chapter 2 summarizes our research on the link between leadership and business outcomes, and, specifically, on the linkage between inspiration and business results.

Chapter 3 explains the objectives for leaders' inspiring behavior. Leadership is obviously directed to subordinates, peers, and those elsewhere in the firm. But, for what purpose? To what end? This chapter defines what the inspirational leader actually accomplishes and why that is so important to the organization.

Chapter 4 provides a quick overview of the research that underpins this work. We didn't want any reader to get bogged down in a somewhat detailed discourse on research, so we've presented only what we thought you needed to know in order to fully appreciate that these conclusions are on a solid footing.

Chapter 5 describes some general characteristics or attributes that the inspirational leader needs to possess. Such compelling data existed for the importance of these basic attributes that we concluded that the reader needed to understand them and their importance for her success. For those who may not have those attributes fully developed, we offer some useful suggestions.

Chapters 6 through 12 are the heart of the book. If your reading time is limited, go there. They present the research that shows precisely what leaders do that inspires the people about them. We have attempted to make this as operational and actionable as possible. A big complaint about books of this kind has been that they serve up platitudes that are nearly impossible for an average mortal to put into action.

Chapter 13 approaches this topic from the opposite direction. What do we know about leaders who have just the opposite effect from being inspirational? What precisely do these leaders do? Can we apply those lessons to ourselves to ensure that we aren't guilty of these practices that do not inspire, but rather have the opposite effect?

Chapter 14 presents our final conclusions and summarizes our findings. You may obtain a copy of this to keep in a convenient

place for frequent reference by going to [www.zengerfolkman.com/Products/Inspiring Leader/summary](http://www.zengerfolkman.com/Products/Inspiring Leader/summary). There you will also find other helpful tools and information.

Finally, be prepared to be reminded of important concepts. Don't expect startling revelations of new truth. The big secret is that there is no big secret. Many of the actions of leaders that inspire others are simply wise management and leadership practices that have been described by others. When we work with leaders, we occasionally hear, "This is common sense." That is true. Our response is simply, "Unfortunately, not often enough is it common practice." There is a chasm between knowing what you should do and doing it. Ask anyone who has ever been on a diet. Our contribution may simply be to make you keenly aware of how important those actions are to your success in inspiring those about you. If you'd like further information and resources about the ideas in this book go to [www.zengerfolkman](http://www.zengerfolkman) and click on the Inspiring Leader icon.

