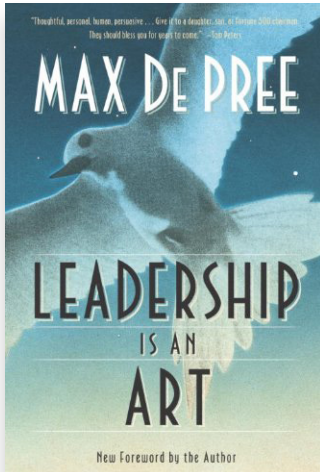


EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARIES

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Max DePree is chairman of the board of directors of Herman Miller, Inc. He was recently elected by Fortune Magazine to the National Business Hall of Fame.

Leadership is an Art THE NUTSHELL

Michigan State University Press, 1987

The ideas, beliefs and principles in this book apply to nearly all group activities. Healthy relationships of different kinds can be built in almost any organization. Leadership is an art, something to be learned over time, not simply by reading books. Leadership is more tribal than scientific, more a weaving of relationships than an amassing of information.

The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between the two, the leaders must become a servant and a debtor. That sums up the progress of an artful leader.

In a day when so much energy seems to be spent on maintenance and manuals, on bureaucracy and meaningless quantification, to be a leader is to enjoy the special privileges of complexity, of ambiguity, of diversity. But to be a leader means, especially, having the opportunity to make a meaningful difference in the lives of those who permit leaders to lead.

I believe that the most effective contemporary management process is participative management. Participative management arises out of the heart and out of a personal philosophy about people. It cannot be added to, or subtracted from, a corporate policy manual as though it

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were one more managerial tool.

In many organizations there are two kinds of leaders – both hierarchical leaders and roving leaders. In special situations, the hierarchical leader is obligated to identify the roving leader, then to support and follow that person, and also to exhibit the grace that enables the roving leader to lead.

When roving leadership is practiced, it makes demands on each of us – whether we're a hierarchical leader, a roving leader, or a good follower. It's a demanding process. It demands that we be enablers of each other. Roving leadership demands a great deal of trust and a clear sense of our interdependence. Leadership is never handled carelessly – we share it, but we don't give it away. Roving leadership also demands discipline. Interestingly, though in organizations like ours we need a lot of freedom, there is no room for license. Discipline is what it takes to do the job.

The condition of our hearts, the openness of our attitudes, the quality of our competence, the fidelity of our experience – these give vitality to the work experience and meaning to life. These are what it takes to make roving leadership possible. And roving leadership, freely and openly practiced together, is the vehicle we can use to reach our potential.

Broadly speaking, there are two types of relationships in industry. The first and most easily understood is the contractual relationship. The contractual relationship covers the quid pro quo of working together.

Three of the key elements in the art of working together are how to deal with change, how to deal with conflict, and how to reach our potential. A legal contract almost always breaks down under the inevitable duress of conflict and change. A contract has nothing to do with reaching our potential.

Covenantal relationships, on the other hand, induce freedom, not paralysis. A covenantal relationship rests on shared commitment to ideas, to issues, to values, to goals, and to management processes. I am convinced that the best management process for today's environment is participative management based on covenantal relationships. Look for the "good goods" of quality relationships that prevail in a corporation as you seek to serve.

One of the great problems of the capitalist system during its first couple of hundred years is that it has been primarily an exclusive system. It has been built primarily around contractual relationships, and it has excluded too many people from both its process and a generally equitable distribution of results. The issue is much more than financial reward: Most people never get the opportunity to be meaningfully involved in the working of the system.

I do not know of a better system, but the capitalist system can be improved, both in practice and in theory, with the influence of an inclusive perspective. A belief that every person brings an offering

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to the group requires us to include as many people as possible. Including people, if we believe in the intrinsic value of their diversity, will be the only path open to us.

How can we begin to make capitalism an inclusive process? Well, there are a number of ways. First of all, by acknowledging both a Christian and a humanistic concept of people. Each of us is needed. Each of us has a gift to bring. Each of us is a social being and our institutions are social units. Each of us has a deep-seated desire to contribute.

Second, the inclusive approach makes me think of a corporation or business or institution as a place of fulfilled potential. For me it helps to think about the concept of a place of fulfilled potential by thinking about some gifts that leaders owe. Leadership is a condition of indebtedness.

Finally, here is a third way to understand and define an inclusive approach. Inclusive capitalism requires something from everyone. People must respond actively to inclusiveness. Naturally, there is a cost to belonging.

Leadership is much more an art, a belief, and a condition of the heart than a set of things to do. The visible signs of artful leadership are expressed, ultimately, in its practice.