

A Leadership Paradox: Influencing Others by Defining Yourself

By Greg Robinson with Mark Rose

A fundamental assumption in most of the literature on leadership is that a few will need to control the many. Looking backward over history, a subtle belief has remained through revolutions, reformations and revivals--the belief that someone must tell the masses how to live, arising from a fundamental mistrust of others and of self. This assumption leads to a search for power but with an either/or mindset: *if I have power, then others cannot have as much as me or they will be a threat.*

Organizations, and the individuals within them, when anxious, experience limited ability to learn and change. There is an alternative, paradoxical way to understand leadership that is applicable in the corporate world. This alternative way of



leadership called "leadership by self-differentiation" has its roots in Dr. Edwin Friedman's family systems theory. This goes beyond just self-knowledge. Self-differentiated or self-defined leaders are those who can set their own direction, regulate their own anxiety and can stay connected to others while not

responding to their anxious demands. It is critical for these leaders to learn to face their fears, challenge their assumptions and thus be able to change their self-perception. A Leadership Paradox outlines such an alternative view of leadership and provides a model for achieving differentiated (defined) leadership.

Each of us lives and participates in systems of relationships. Some of those systems possess an atmosphere of fear and anxiety. Others promote conditions of openness, freedom and self-determination. A Leadership Paradox highlights the idea that leadership is one of the few critical levers capable of transforming systems of fear into systems of freedom. If true change is to be a real possibility, the first question to be considered is the very nature of the change being pursued. This dialogue thus begins by considering the difference of sustainable change that brings progress versus change that results in sameness. It is this purpose of sustainable change that will be a guide to view the particular characteristics of leadership.

Using leadership as a lens, this book promotes sustainable change in three ways. First, it calls for leaders to stop and reflect on how leadership affects change. Second, it provides a map and language for leaders to overcome fear and develop new ways of thinking. Finally, it provides some concrete applications for how the self-defining process works and how it is used in the day to day world of work.

How is this book different from other leadership books? First, many good books on leadership have identified what characteristics effective leaders possess. Not as many have described how those characteristics are developed. This book provides a learning model for how leaders develop these characteristics. Second, this book calls on leaders to quit trying to manage the consequences of a failed bureaucratic model of organization. It clearly defines the root issues behind the fear, mistrust and

immaturity that are holding organizations captive today. Finally, this book is different because it shifts the discussion of leadership away from techniques for changing and commanding others and towards the source of real power – defining oneself.

Overall, this book draws from theology, organizational development, psychology, and educational theory to examine the leader's role in the process of sustainable change. This book focuses on what could be called meta-skills. Rather than prescribe particular answers to issues, meta-skills equip people to discover solutions regardless of the particulars of the situation. Much like reading is an underlying skill for all education, self-differentiation (self-definition) is an underlying learning process that promotes maturity, health, and wisdom. Based on research within a Fortune 500 company over a period of two years, the learning model has been demonstrated as transferable and highly successful in helping leaders intentionally pursue self-differentiation (self-definition).

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