

THE BEST LEADERS KEEP IT REAL

Discover Your Authentic
Identity as a Leader

By Glenn Taylor



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ABOUT GLENN

Hi, I'm Glenn Taylor, and I'm devoted to helping you harness sky-high potential!

I grew up loving music, dance, art and magic, captivated by the power of creativity and live performance. When I started my career in marketing at one of the nation's top symphony orchestras, I didn't know I would end up developing a passion for helping others to perform — not in the arts, but as leaders and teams.

After a successful 11-year tenure at the Houston Symphony, I decided to turn my experiences in marketing and leadership into a career in coaching and training others.

That's when I started Skybound Coaching and Training, where our mission is to help folks harness sky-high leadership potential to create more dynamic, human workplaces. We believe working with a leadership coach shouldn't feel formal or artificial. Professional development can be approachable, interactive, even fun!

I'm a Professional Certified Coach (PCC) through the International Coaching Federation (ICF), a CPCC coach through the Co-Active Training Institute (CTI), and a Past-President of the ICF Houston Chapter. I also have a Master's Degree in Organization Development and Leadership.

If you're into leadership, sci-fi/fantasy, video games, breakfast tacos, and the occasional dad joke, we should connect!

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00 INTRODUCTION



ARE YOU READY TO DISCOVER YOUR UNIQUE IDENTITY AS A LEADER?

Early on in my career, I started chasing the idea of being what I thought was the “perfect leader” — the most-successful, smartest-in-the-room, outgoing, flawless, and polished person. Although I didn’t realize it at the time, my concept of a leader had been shaped by various cultural influences, stereotypes, and myths.

I eventually discovered that becoming this “perfect leader” was not only impossible to attain, but it didn’t feel genuine. It was coming from the outside-in, not the inside-out.

I’m grateful that my journey as a leader, and now as a professional coach, has given me the chance to gain a truer understanding of leadership and, more importantly, to find my own authentic expression of it.

Whether you’re new to the idea of being a leader, or you’ve been in leadership positions for years, this ebook is an invitation to you — to take a closer look at your own concepts of leadership and to discover your unique way of leading.

It’s a process of self-awareness building, reflection, calibration, and action. Each section of this book examines one of five steps within the process, and provides you with focus questions and action items so you can reflect and then get into motion.

Openness to Change:

Discovering and embracing your authentic identity as a leader might mean challenging some of your own assumptions, adjusting your mindsets, and accepting greater vulnerability. That means you’ll need to be open to change.

What I know pretty definitively about human beings is that we don’t typically like change. We like comfort zones. Even the most ambitious of us have to push against the urge to stay in the status quo. Why? It’s because our natural instincts are trying to protect us from danger and uncertainty. It’s how we’re wired. And don’t get me wrong; I agree that it can be a nice place to stay! However, as one of my favorite quotes says:

“A comfort zone is a beautiful place, but nothing ever grows there.”

—Unknown

Question: Are you ready to embrace change for the sake of greater authenticity and impact as a leader?

What's Else Might Get In Your Way?

In addition to comfort zones, there are other factors that might prevent you from looking inward.

Life is Busy:

How many times lately have you answered the question of "How are you doing?" with "Busy!"? Technology is changing how we all communicate. How? Among other things, it's ever increasing the pressure to connect and respond to more people in more ways. This intense pace can put you in a state of overwhelm. As a result, it's harder to make space to clarify what you stand for, honor what's most important and see where you're headed.

Fear:

This is probably the single biggest limiter. It's not only tied into keeping you in the status quo, but it keeps you small. Fear prevents us from being vulnerable and sharing our true selves. Fear of failure. Fear of loss. Fear of rejection. What would be possible without fear?

Expectations:

Whether perceived or real, the pressure you feel from the expectations of others, and yourself, can be a significant dampener of potential. Expectations are stories that someone else tries to write for you. Or, often, your own internal fear voices are writing them. Either way, they are a lot less interesting, exciting, impactful and triumphant than the real ones that unfold when you allow your true self to lead.

"Be Realistic":

The need to "be realistic" can hinder your ability to envision a new way of being. Tapping into greater authenticity might lead you to changing your role, taking on a new project, or following an entrepreneurial dream. And as the actor/producer/musician Will Smith wisely said:

"Being realistic is the most commonly travelled road to mediocrity."

—Will Smith

Environmental Influences:

We're all a product of our environment and experiences. These inputs create powerful filters that color how we hear, see and understand others and ourselves. Becoming more aware of these influences can help you choose which ones are empowering and which ones are unnecessarily limiting. Otherwise, you'll believe all of it.

01

CHOOSE YOUR PERSPECTIVE ON LEADERSHIP



WHAT DOES LEADERSHIP MEAN TO YOU?

When you look for an official definition of leadership, you can easily get confused and overwhelmed. There are probably as many different perspectives on leadership as there are different people writing about it.

For me, that variety is one of the things that makes the topic so interesting. It's a concept that doesn't have one clean-cut definition. I think of it as a kaleidoscope — there are lots of things to see and discover from various angles.

Think about the mix of leaders you've encountered so far in your life. I bet they've all had a slightly different way to express their particular brand of leadership.

Part of your journey to greater authenticity means forming your own point of view on leadership.

Start Here:

These thought exercises will help you start to uncover your own theory of leadership:

- What leaders have you admired most, and why? What qualities did they have and what skills did they use?
- If a friend asked you to define leadership right now, what words or phrases would you use?

Multiple Lenses on Leadership:

Which of these definitions of leadership do you like the most, and why? Which do you like the least?

- ▶ “Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality.” — Warren Bennis
- ▶ “A leader’s role is to raise people’s aspirations for what they can become and to release their energies so they will try to get there.” — David R. Gergen
- ▶ “Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something because he or she wants to do it.” — Dwight D. Eisenhower
- ▶ “As we look ahead into the next century, leaders will be those who empower others.” — Bill Gates
- ▶ “Leadership is hard to define and good leadership even harder. But if you can get people to follow you to the ends of the earth, you are a great leader.” — Indra Nooyi
- ▶ “We hold ourselves back in ways both big and small, by lacking self-confidence, by not raising our hands, and by pulling back when we should be leaning in. Be ambitious not just in pursuing your dreams but in aspiring to become leaders in your fields.” — Sheryl Sandberg

ESSENTIALS TO CONSIDER

Amidst the various definitions of leadership, I'd suggest that there are a few essentials of leadership that are fundamental across approaches. These core characteristics differentiate leading from other ways of interacting with people.

One thing's for sure — leadership is different than following, coasting, or reacting. Leading involves a more proactive approach, and is typically focused on bringing about an envisioned future. Leadership isn't only dependent on the efforts of you the leader, but is tied to relationships and collaboration with others.

Leadership is different than following, coasting, or reacting.

I believe leadership is not about having a title, but about being influential. In this way, everyone can exercise leadership behaviors. Even if some of us are born with more innate leadership qualities, I believe the skills of leadership can be learned and practiced.

To Summarize These Essentials:

- **Leadership aims towards a vision:** Leadership is aspirational. It looks into the future and to what's possible, towards a goal and vision — something to be accomplished. When leading

a team, this vision is most effectively formed collaboratively, and is then championed and further influenced by a leader.

- **Leadership is about influence, not title:** In contrast to authority or power, influence is the ability to affect the thinking and actions of others. That occurs without compulsion, but happens organically due to the relationship and respect that exists between a leader and followers, or because of the pure merit of the leader or their ideals.
- **Leadership is about collaboration:** You can't be of influence if there's no one to influence. Leadership happens in the team context. Leaders work with others to accomplish shared goals through a collaborative effort.
- **Anyone can learn to lead:** Leadership involves a set of mindsets and behaviors, and they can be learned. As long as someone has the desire and openness to learn and grow, they can become a leader.

Which of these essentials do you agree with? Which will you include in your own point of view on leadership?

DIFFERENT LEADERSHIP STYLES

Leadership styles reflect how a leader emphasizes certain behaviors and characteristics over others. A leader's style plays-out in how they interact and communicate with their team.

Leaders differ in style depending on their own unique qualities and perspectives on leadership. It's not uncommon for a leader to mix several different leadership styles, or even shift back and forth based on the situation.

As you continue to shape your own point of view on leadership, which of these would you want to embody the most? Which would feel most authentic?

Democratic: This style of leadership emphasizes inclusion and consensus-building as a pathway to better decision-making. Democratic leaders leverage listening and empathy in order to ensure all perspectives are heard and that team members remain engaged.

Directive: Leaders that utilize this style don't allow much time for consensus-building. Although they consider the input of team members, they are keen to draw decisions to a close and provide clear direction. They emphasize efficiency in operations and communications.

Task-Oriented: Leaders that embody a task-oriented style are focused on action and accountability. They put more emphasis on task completion rather than relationships, team dynamics, or longer-term thinking.

Relationship-Based: This style of leadership is attentive to building connections between team members, and creating the conditions that promote an effective team culture. Relationship-based leaders emphasize the use of soft skills to build deeper levels of trust, unity and "glue" among a team.

Hands-Off: The hands-off leader places emphasis on delegating tasks to others on the team, and puts stock in trusting his or her team members to get the job done. Leaders that typify this style are sensitive to keeping their thinking and tasks at a higher level, while leaving operational concerns to others.

Coaching: The coaching leader places energy and focus on propelling fellow team members forward. This type of leader is tuned-in to supporting his or her employees in developing new skills and advancing their careers. When a leader takes a coaching role, they're not teaching, telling, or correcting. Rather, they're helping employees find their own solutions, grow in confidence, and become empowered to solve problems on their own.

REFLECT & ACT

Focus Questions:

- What stereotypes or myths have you been carrying around about leadership?
- How has your point of view on leadership changed after reading this chapter?
- Which leadership definitions from page 8 did you like the most and least? Why?
- Do you disagree with any of the proposed essentials on page 9? If so, how come?
- What mix of leadership styles from page 10 would you like to embody most?

Take Action:

- Describe what you see as an effective leader. Make a list of their top qualities and skills. Keep your list under 10 items.
- Initiate a discussion about leadership with a colleague or friend. How is their point of view on what leadership means similar or different from yours?
- Experiment with embodying one of the leadership styles from page 10. See if you can represent that style in your words and actions. Did it feel effective and authentic?