

## The Leader as a Mensch

### Become the Kind of Person Others Want to Follow

#### About the Author



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#### ■ The Big Idea

People follow the footsteps of those they consider trustworthy. You cannot have effective leadership without credibility; and the quickest route to earn credibility is to act as a Mensch. This book explores what it takes to be a Mensch.

A Mensch is a man or a woman of integrity and honor, an upstanding individual, a decent person with admirable characteristics. It describes an individual who is higher on the evolutionary scale, a person in whose presence we feel safe; a person who makes us feel good about ourselves. It is someone we want to work for, someone we want as our spouse or business partner – someone we would welcome as a friend. To be called a Mensch is the greatest compliment one can give you.

The book is organized around the metaphor of a tree. As a Mensch, the roots represent our foundation, that which anchors and nurtures us and gives us our resilience. It's our stability, the most crucial part of our being. Just as a tree cannot survive without its roots, so a leader cannot exist as a leader without these foundational qualities –

humility, authenticity and empathy.

While the roots are underground, the trunk is the visible part – the outward manifestation of who we are. It is the body of our leadership ethos in action which others see clearly. It comprises our accountability, our optimism, and our comportment as a leader.

And the branches are further manifestations of how we stretch ourselves to reach and inspire others as leaders – they represent our moods, our generosity, and our appreciation of others. Our power to influence and inspire those who surround us lives in our branches.

## **Why You Need This Book**

This book illustrates the quality of integrity and honor, decency and reliability, empathy and appreciation, selflessness and service that allow men and women at any level in any organization to influence and motivate others, not by the exercise of authority, but through example as an upstanding individual with an admirable character. The book provides a wealth of practical advice for anyone in society who has opportunity to influence others.

## **PART ONE: ROOTS**

### *THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WORD IN ENGLISH – HUMILITY*

The dictionary defines humility as the quality or state of someone who is modest, who lacks pretence, who does not believe that he or she is superior to others. It's about a quiet confidence without the need for a meretricious selling of our wares. It's about being content to let others discover the layers of one's talents without having to boast about them.

Something interesting happens when we approach situations from a perspective of humility – it opens us up to possibilities as we choose open-mindedness and curiosity over protecting our own points of view. The Mensch leader spends more time in that wonderful space of the 'beginner's mind,' willing to learn from what

others have to offer. This translates into moving away from pushing into allowing, away from insecurity to security, away from seeking approval to seeking enlightenment. It's forgetting about being perfect and enjoying being in the moment.

### Leaves of Humility:

- Here are three magical words that will produce more peace of mind than a week at an expensive retreat: "You are right."
- Make it a habit to ask more questions – in conversations, in meetings, in casual encounters. It's one of the most useful tools for productive conversations and it boosts the self-esteem of the people being asked.
- Hire people who are smarter than you are – whose talents surpass yours – and give them opportunities for growth. It's the smart thing to do and it is a sign of high personal humility.

## *THE TALISMAN OF LEADERSHIP – AUTHENTICITY*

'The Leader as a Mensch' is the epitome of authenticity. The hallmark of this person is candor – the avoidance of all deception. When we are in the presence of a Mensch, we cannot help but notice the absence of artificiality. We sense that we are confronted with a real person, one who doesn't set out to make an impression. A Mensch just is.

'The Leader as a Mensch' comes from a position that "I am enough". This echoes a serenity of mind, a calm spirit that characterizes a Mensch who doesn't come from a sense of incompleteness which is so often associated with modern humanity.

Part of a Mensch's code of conduct is that they are also promise keepers. This applies to even the smallest of promises. We don't hear the expression 'a gentleman's agreement' as often any more. It refers to an unwritten agreement backed only by the integrity of the individuals involved in the transaction. It is an agreement based on honor, on the premise that the person's word is the pledge. This is one of the sterling qualities of a Mensch.

### Leaves of Authenticity:

- Adversity reveals our true character. Consider your conduct when things go wrong. Remind yourself that, as a leader, you are continuously under a looking glass. People want to be inspired by you.
- To understand the connection between authenticity and blogging as the new and different way for businesses to communicate, read *Naked Conversations*, by Robert Scoble and Shel Israel. Learn the six pillars of blogging.
- Straight talk, self-confidence and simplicity—these are the building blocks of substance, the triumph over image. Think about how you can make these a daily habit.

### GHANDI'S NEURONS – EMPATHY

While empathy is an emotional activity, it is far from being a sentimental topic. At its core, empathy keeps relationships running smoothly. It is one of the prime distinguishing characteristics of a Mensch – an integral part of the deep-seated roots from which spring kindness, compassion, and understanding.

Consider that, fundamentally, leadership is a relationship – a relationship between leaders and followers, between leaders and colleagues, customers and other stakeholders. Without this relationship, leadership simply doesn't exist. If we accept that leadership is the relationship, then empathy is the most crucial component for relationship success.

How we make others feel is the secret to human relationships.

### Leaves of Empathy:

- Be fully present when you are with people. Don't check your email, look at your watch or take phone calls when a direct report drops into your office to talk to you. Put yourself in their shoes. How would you feel if your boss did that to you?
- Don't interrupt people. Don't dismiss their concerns offhand. Don't rush to give advice. Don't change the subject. Allow people their moment.

- As a leader, you have a unique opportunity to touch lives deeply. Once in a while, remind yourself of this awesome responsibility.

## PART TWO: TRUNK

### *I SWEAR BY APOLLO – ACCOUNTABILITY*

Self-accountability is staying true to ourselves despite difficult circumstances. It's doing the right thing even when we are tempted to bend a few rules for expediency's sake. Perhaps Deborah Lee puts it best: "Self-accountability is who you are when no one is looking." It's also the best antidote to feeling victimized by circumstances and, in so doing, frees up precious creative energy for us to accomplish what matters to us.

Above all, it entails owning up to the consequences of our decisions and choices, because there is no choice without accountability.

#### **Leaves of Accountability:**

- Be self-accountable for your own happiness. No one can go on a diet for you, just as no one can be responsible for your state of mind. We are totally responsible for the impact that others have on us. Spend time to understand the disruptive effect that emotions can have on your behavior and resolve to do something about it.
- Is there an area in your life where you may have inadvertently slipped? Should you take steps to rectify this? Consider Tom Peters' "Tip #8 in 100 Ways to Succeed": If you foul up, fess up, fast and fastidiously (tell the whole truth). And then get on with your life.
- Resolve to do no harm in anything that you undertake. If you are certain that you don't have the competence to take on something that is offered, consider that you might be doing harm to someone by accepting it anyway.

### *THE LEADER'S LANTERN – OPTIMISM*

As research has proven, the positive effects of being optimistic – fighting depression; aiding in professional, academic and sports achievement; and

boosting mental and physical health - outweigh the benefits of being a career pessimist. So how does one keep optimistic with difficult times?

The answer is, as Seligman explains, “flexible optimism” i.e., having the wisdom to assess situations and identify those that require a pessimistic inquisition and those that call for optimism, for having a “can do attitude.” If your default mode is skepticism and pessimism, be encouraged to consider that there might be a huge payoff by including optimism as part of your operating system. Sir Winston Churchill had a reason for saying: “A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.”

Practice seeing the opportunity. Practice having an ‘appreciative mind.’

### **Leaves of Optimism:**

- Become aware of your stance in business meetings. Are you known as the devil’s advocate – the one who is quick to shoot down others’ ideas? Jumping in too quickly to negate an idea can derail the creative process of others. Often valuable ideas are the result of an initial ‘crazy’ thought. At meetings, even when we don’t have the floor, we are under a magnifying glass. Practice being more upbeat and see what happens. Practice being the last one to speak and see what happens.
- Another helpful tool is reframing – deliberately shifting perspective and looking for the hidden positive in a negative situation. Look for the gift in the adversity.
- When you encounter adversity, ask yourself if this situation will last for your entire life. No adversity lasts that long.

### ***NOT AN ACT, BUT A HABIT – MASTERY***

What are the cornerstones of the pursuit of mastery and grace for ‘The Leader as a Mensch’? It translates itself into two major areas: mastery of the self, and mastery of relationships. While mastery of one’s profession is a given – and leaders devote years to perfect that aspect of their career – ‘The Leader as a Mensch’ seeks another dimension. He or she knows that just as it is important to have financial acumen, industry knowledge and a global perspective, it is equally important to have the ability to attract the best talent, to foster open dialogues and to inspire trust.

They know that just as it is crucial to have seasoned judgment, visionary thinking and strategic management, they also need to know how to build healthy organizational relationships, how to truly inspire others and leverage cultural diversity. They may have been taught to develop algorithms but 'The Leader as a Mensch' knows that developing people is also highly valuable.

### Leaves of Mastery:

- Grace is a sense of fitness and propriety. It is also a disposition to be generous and helpful. Think about your current relationships, whether direct reports, colleagues or superiors. Are you showing up with executive presence in all of them? Which relationships might need a tune up or re-adjustment on your part?
- The relationship is the conversation. Know the difference between a conversation and a discussion. A discussion involves issues of right vs. wrong, it is an exchange of facts, opinions and data. A conversation is a personal exploration of another person for the sole purpose of learning about them.
- It is impossible to have true executive presence with an aggressive stance. This does not mean giving in, it means holding one's position with grace and regard for the other person. When criticizing others, it means replacing phrases such as "You need to..." and "You must not..." with "I encourage you to..." or "You might consider how..."

## PART THREE: BRANCHES

### *THE DIMMER SWITCH OF PERFORMANCE – A LEADER'S MOOD*

Part of your responsibility as a leader is to create a good place for people to deliver their best work. It is difficult for people to excel at doing something they don't enjoy. Do people enjoy working for you?

As the leader, you have in your hand the switch that can control the intensity of engagement of the people who do the work in your organization. It's like being a director in a movie. "The first work of the director is to set the mood so that the actor's work can take place."

A leader's upbeat mood metaphorically oxygenates the blood of followers – it's transfusion into the corporate arteries. It may be one of the most potent contributions you can make as a leader. It's being a Mensch.

### Leaves of High Performance:

- Look for good in others. Long before leadership books were in vogue, Andre Malraux, French novelist and statesman, reminded us that one of the central objectives of a leader is to make others aware of the greatness that lies in them. Be known in your organization as someone who is always on the lookout for what is right with people. It engenders good will and is good for business.
- Create a "Stop Doing List" to minimize stress and achieve clarity of focus. What are your energy drainers? Are these among some of the offenders that may cause you stress: internalizing others' criticism, fragmented boundaries, power struggles, unprotected personal time, useless networking, continuous one-way favors? What can you do to address these and other drainers so that you can stay in your power and reduce your stress? What can you do to make room for what energizes you and brings you closer to achieving your goals?
- Be particularly mindful of how you manage the emotions if your organization is undergoing change: how you handle emotions during these crucial times can help or hinder the change process. It's a known fact that if the resistance to change is emotional, it is the hardest form of resistance to overcome.

### *DEGREES OF GIVING – GENEROSITY*

When we think of generosity, thoughts automatically drift to gifts of money or charity. While this is important, in the context of leadership, there are other gifts that don't have a monetary value but whose value is beyond price. These include giving someone a chance, giving someone the benefit of the doubt and giving others a reason to want to work for you. It entails giving others latitude, permission to make mistakes and all the information they need to do the job. It means giving them the authority that goes with responsibility– giving them due credit for their ideas. In a nutshell, all of this translates to generosity of spirit, a quality we admire in leaders.

### Leaves of Generosity:

- Resolve to become a philanthropist of know-how. What knowledge, expertise or best practices can you share with others to enrich them?
- Practice “The 80/20 Rule” in communication: Listen 80 percent of the time and talk for 20 percent of the time. Watch how others respond when this happens. No one ever complains of being listened to too much.
- Look around you and pick someone who needs encouragement and resolve to give them that. Consider that some people have never received encouragement in their life – not from teachers, not from bosses, not even from parents.

### *THE BIGGEST HUNGER – APPRECIATION*

A fundamental quality of ‘The Leader as a Mensch’ is the appreciation of others – seeing others not as a problem to be fixed but as a reservoir of skills, talents and ideas to be nurtured and developed.

Practice seeing others, truly seeing them in their utmost potential and remind yourself, every day, of the power of appreciation. It will help you create a culture where people are willing to share their ideas and insights for the success of your organization.

Mother Teresa said, “There is more hunger in the world for love and appreciation than for bread.” This applies to everyone, at every level, in every corner of the world.

### Leaves of Appreciation:

- Praise has a limited “best before” date. Don’t delay its expression or wait until performance review time – when you see something that is worthy of praising, do so promptly after the event.

- Make your genuine words memorable for your constituents by being specific about the achievement. Not many of us remember the perfunctory “job well done” but we all remember someone who tells us “This was pure genius!” or “I would have missed this if you hadn’t picked it up.” Praise does not have to be elaborate. It just needs to be genuine.
- When you drop by an employee’s office or cubicle to deliver the praise, don’t follow your praise with a conversation about business matters or other projects. Deliver the praise and leave. Come back later for discussions on other matters. This gives the praise its moment of honor and heightens its value in the eyes of the recipient.

In the end, the Mensch is a generous spirit who is willing to serve as a mirror to reflect the brilliance of others.

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