

Chopra, D. (2010). *The soul of leadership: Unlocking your potential for greatness*. New York, NY: Harmony Books.

Reviewed by

Introduction

Deepak Chopra's book, *The Soul of Leadership: Unlocking Your Potential for Greatness* is the best-selling author's fifty-seventh publication. In his text, Chopra tackles the essential characteristics burgeoning leaders must develop to solve today's societal crises. He asserts that, individuals must move through seven stages, represented by the acronym L-E-A-D-E-R-S in order to be a successful leader. Through this, inspired leaders become whole, learn to lead from the soul, and can accomplish their vision for a greater society. The author uses well-known, historically successful leaders as the basis for these seven qualities and emphasizes that any individual can attain the success represented by their stories. Chopra's book is a unique and interesting glimpse at the essential characteristics of leadership. Designed to aid anyone interested in leading, it is targeted at a varied audience; those familiar or unfamiliar with leadership theory, strategies, and publications could benefit from using the text as a tool for reflection. As an opinion-based text, this book provides a fun and creative way to envision leadership; however, it is to be cautiously used and only in conjunction with relevant leadership theory texts.

Theoretical Frame

Chopra does not frame his argument within any theoretical constructs. However, many of the concepts discussed can be tied in with other leadership theories and models. Examining Post-Industrial Leadership models, such as Authentic Leadership, Relational Leadership, Servant Leadership, and the Social Change Model of Leadership, it is clear that many of the tenants of Chopra's theory can easily tie into these well-established theories. Additionally, the author does briefly mention Abraham Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs*, although he quickly asserts that his version of the hierarchy is solely of his creation. While similarities can be easily identified between the text and other leadership theories and models, at no time does Chopra attribute anyone for informing his theory.

Elements of the book

Introduction

Chopra introduces his book by testifying to the great need for *inspired leaders* in today's society. Chopra continues, by outlining his definition of leadership, stating, "At the deepest level, a leader is the symbolic soul of the group. His role is to fulfill the needs of others and, when each need is met, to lead the group on to fulfill ever higher needs, lifting the group's potential at every step" (p. 10). The author specifically mentions how his definition and literature instructs readers to move away from the *traditional* approach of leadership (formally considered Industrial leadership) towards recognition of creativity, love, intelligence and organizing power as trademarks of inspired leadership.

The author affirms that anyone can be an inspired leader and that if individuals choose this path, they can become a *successful visionary* that "makes his or her vision manifest in the world" (p. 12). Chopra continues by explaining that when he describes the soul and how it connects to leadership, he is not speaking of the soul as traditionally defined by leadership, but of

it as an awareness to the world and that through it, individuals “are seamlessly connected with everything in the universe, to the silent domain from which all matter and energy spring” (p. 12). He continues by stating how important understanding your soul is to recognizing your leadership potential.

Chopra then briefly outlines the organization of the book before reaffirming why the soul matters within leadership. He emphasizes his version of Abraham Maslow’s *Hierarchy of Needs* (identified as: *Safety and Security, Achievement and success, Creativity, Nurturing and Belonging, Creativity and Progress, Moral Values, and Spiritual Fulfillment*) and using Buddha, Christ and Martin Luther King Jr. as examples, discusses how meeting the basic needs of others is integral to successful leadership.

Part One: L-E-A-D-E-R-S

Part one is composed of detailed descriptions of the necessary tools for all inspired leaders to master. On the first page of each chapter, the author outlines the significant points from the chapter’s text. These pages are beneficial for anyone looking for a quick snapshot of the content.

Chapter One: L=Look and Listen.

In this chapter, Chopra explains how leaders must embrace certain qualities to become successful visionaries, specifically, “passion, core values, and dedication to a purpose” (p. 24). He goes on to discuss how the creation of a vision is necessary for leaders to guide and inspire others and that this process is not a solo quest, but one that is completed through experiential opportunities that everyone has access to through work, family, and social outlets.

The ideals of looking and listening are the first-crucial step in becoming an inspired leader and creating a personal vision. Chopra expresses how the ability to use your mind, body, soul, and heart to “arrive at the point where looking and listening comes from your entire being” (p. 27) is critical to attaining a vision and becoming an inspired leader. To do this he outlines the *Four Levels of Perception*. These levels are, *observing, analysis, feeling, and incubation*. In the observing level, individuals are instructed to mimic a video camera, allowing sights and sounds to come in freely and objectively. The second level, analysis, emphasizes weighing and analyzing every idea in an unbiased way, being unafraid to identify new solutions. Through feeling, the individual involves their heart, and opens themselves to sudden insight through the use of emotion and intuition. Finally, the incubation process encourages this newly-formed vision to settle in the subconscious, where “a profound and infinite intelligence nurses your vision, adapting it to your needs and the needs of everyone around you” (p. 28).

Chopra then helps his readers create a single-sentence mission statement that embodies personal values and intentions by asking specific questions about qualities, skills, talents, and experiences. After creating a vision, Chopra instructs his readers on how to use this new mission in conjunction with advanced listening skills to meet the hierarchy of needs of the groups each leader works with. He concludes the chapter with common scenarios a leader may encounter regarding the group’s hierarchy of needs, a listing of what makes a good listener, a summary of the lessons expressed by the chapter, and tasks for each reader to complete to more fully understand these lessons.

Chapter Two: E=Emotional Bonding

Chopra begins by expressing his belief that all successful visionaries have forged emotional bonds with their followers. These bonds are demonstrated by group members through the following behaviors: “They want to be in the leader’s presence. They want to be of service.

They want to perform at their best, which brings them closer to the leader. They want to share in the leader's vision. They want to participate in the leader's success" (p. 43). He emphasizes that these behaviors are not because of coercion, but because "this is how a group functions when it feels inspired" (p. 43).

Chopra then introduces and explicitly defines the basic principles of his definition of emotional intelligence (which he identifies as *emotional freedom, shared enthusiasm, genuine caring for others, willingness to build a relationship, reinforcing the strengths of others, increasing the self-esteem of others, nonviolent communication, and conflict resolution*) and how when used to inform work with others, they can aid in developing emotional bonds between people. The author states that the fulfillment of emotions is tied to the hierarchy of needs, and that successful leaders are able to fulfill these needs by recognizing the emotional needs of their followers. Chopra offers examples of how negative emotions can block individual's fulfillment on each level of the hierarchy, and gives strategies for leaders to employ to counteract this occurrence.

Finally, Chopra expresses how the last two needs are indicative of spiritual intelligence, not emotional intelligence. He asserts that spiritual intelligence "gets us in touch with love, compassion, joy and inner peace" (p. 56). The author then recommends a meditation exercise to be completed twice a day for twenty minutes. This activity assists leaders in merging emotional and spiritual intelligence, which in turn opens the soul to awareness. Chopra ends the chapter by giving his readers "Ten Behaviors for Mending Emotional Distance" (pp. 60-61).

Chapter Three: A=Awareness

In this section of Chopra's book, he asserts that consciousness and awareness are synonymous; that to be an effective leader, one must grasp each situation intuitively and completely before looking within themselves to find the answer. The author then defines the Seven Attributes of Consciousness, more specifically, *centeredness, self-motivation, coherence, intuition and insight, creativity, inspiration, and transcendence* (p.65) which are designed to mirror the seven hierarchical needs that Chopra refers to throughout the text. To be a successful visionary, leaders must understand and have experience with each of the seven attributes.

Chopra then tells Nelson Mandela's story of personal growth through imprisonment and concludes by assigning his readers a task to cultivate a sense of expanded awareness through an individualized "Awareness Program". This step-by-step program involves nine recommended behaviors/steps (*Stop struggling; Keep listening to your inner voice; Meditate in order to reach the core of your awareness; Test your boundaries; Remain centered; Look beyond your personal beliefs; Gather information from every source; Learn to have clear intentions; and Value inner peace* (pp. 79-86)) that he provides detailed descriptions of and examples on how to accomplish.

Chapter Four: D= Doing

Using awareness to support effective decision making helps the developing leader learn the skills necessary to take action. Chopra is clear that a leader must be oriented towards taking action. If successfully leading from the soul, *doing* becomes *nondoing*. Chopra stresses that doing is a skill and can be developed following five sequential steps, outlined in the text as (1) Be Action Oriented; (2) Act as a Role Model; (3) Commit Yourself to Good, Honest Feedback; (4) Be Persistent; and (5) Take Time to Celebrate (p. 88-89). Chopra articulates the importance of authenticity and awareness of self to becoming a successful visionary. When individual leaders have developed awareness and an understanding of their soul, they will instinctively know how to meet the hierarchical needs of their group by fulfilling particular roles. Chopra identifies these roles as *Protector, Achiever, Team Builder, Nurturer, Innovator, Transformer,*

and *Sage and Seer* (pp. 90-93). The author likens *nondoing* to the feeling athletes have when *in the zone*; stepping aside from consciously controlling your body, and letting your soul take control. To achieve a successful visionary status, inspired leaders must be able to attain this state.

The second half of the chapter is dedicated to developing the *nondoing* ability through four principles: *Consciousness has organizing power*; *Consciousness makes quantum leaps of creativity*; *Consciousness moves naturally in the direction of growth*; and *Consciousness creates order out of disorder* (pp. 100-104). Once achieved, Chopra believes that as a leader, you are able to achieve your highest goals. In the “What to Do Today” section, the author charges his readers to examine their typical decision-making process through a list of twenty elements identified as indicators of *right* decisions.

Chapter Five: E=Empowerment

Within this chapter, Chopra focuses on how leaders handle and accept the responsibility of power, and through careful use of it, are able to empower not only themselves, but also their followers. According to Chopra, power is a necessary evil, as a leader cannot realize their vision without it. He claims that power follows certain historical principles; (1) Power accumulates. The more a leader gets, the more will come to him. (2) The powerful rise only to fall. The higher a leader climbs, the more inevitable is his downfall. (3) Power corrupts. Leaders who start out to do good wind up doing evil. (4) Power is exceptional. The ordinary person willingly or unwillingly surrenders his power to a handful of power-seekers and is left with none for himself (p. 109). Chopra asserts that by using broad awareness and consciously leading from the soul anyone can avoid these certain pitfalls. He then describes in detail specific strategies for leaders to successfully counteract these principles.

The first principle is overcome using *transpersonal power*, which is a non-ego based way to inspire others through compassion, trust, stability and hope. Chopra defines each characteristic in detail and describes the path to fulfilling them. The second principle, which is fueled by ego, can be combated by “encouraging your being” (p. 119). More exactly, allowing one’s new sense of awareness to expand without limitation and acting only when a feeling of calm certainty is present. The third principle is driven by the *dark side of human nature* also referred to by Chopra as the *shadow*, this “hidden area of the psyche [is] where anger, fear, greed, envy, and violence are kept out of sight” (p. 120). Chopra defines each type of shadow that correlates to the individual leader roles mentioned above in chapter four, and offers instruction on how to counteract them, and eventually merge the shadow into the soul. Finally, the last principle is offset by an understanding that “the source of power is universal. Everyone contains infinite potential” (p.126) and it is the visionary leader’s responsibility to empower his or her followers to connecting with their souls. Chopra recommends looking at each individual follower and identifying three of their strengths from a list of twenty-one attributes or skills he identifies in the text.

Chopra encourages his readers to understand that power is selfless, and power that comes from the soul provides calmness and confidence. He outlines a visualization activity that readers should complete every day in order to learn how to approach power from a perspective of play.

Chapter Six: R=Responsibility

The successful visionary’s responsibility is not only to their vision, but also to constantly evolving and encouraging others to evolve as well. The author divides leader’s responsibilities into eight ideals; “I am responsible for what I think; I am responsible for how I feel; I am responsible for how I perceive the world; I am responsible for my role in society; I am

responsible for my immediate environment; I am responsible for my speech; [and] I am responsible for my body” (p. 137). Once these responsibilities are fully accepted and mastered, wholeness between individuals and their souls can be achieved.

Chopra believes that as individuals master each responsibility, a blending of mind, body, behavior, and speech occur, which in turn helps developing visionaries master life as well as leadership. Chopra charges his readers to not only develop a plan for evolution but also to be cognizant of forces that block it as well. He delineates ten behaviors which are discouraging to the process of evolution. As the soul of the group, it is the leader’s responsibility to anchor and inspire the group to move towards evolution. According to Chopra, being aware of these behaviors emboldens leaders to constantly evolve.

Chapter Seven: S=Synchronicity

Chopra explains that to be a successful visionary, each leader must engage in synchronicity. Through the invisible powers of synchronicity, the soul is able to create large miracles. These miracles support the leader’s vision and aides in attaining all goals. Chopra is insistent that anyone can attain synchronization through practical paths. Chopra identifies *The Path to Miracles* through the following suggestions, “Regard synchronicity as normal. Look for the hidden message. Go where you are guided. Be here in the present. Understand the harmony of contained conflicts. Encourage unity; discourage divisions. Align yourself with a new belief: ‘*I am the world*’” (p. 164).

In the conclusion of this chapter, Chopra indicates that synchronicity is standard for any openly aware and soulful individual. To accomplish this openness, he requests that each reader rids themselves of any label association. He recommends a variety of ways to strip gender, racial, physical, socioeconomic and personal labels by giving back to the community. Chopra concludes by reminding his readers that “A leader should aspire to be the soul of the group. You can attain this goal in any group once you see the soul in everyone else. . .If you allow this process to touch you deeply, you won’t need labels of any kind. To be a wave on the ocean of life will be glorious enough” (p. 180).

Part Two: Two Who Lead From the Soul

In the following two chapters, Chopra examines the leadership journey and experience of Jeremy Moon and Renata M. Black, two inspiring tales of success. The author’s purpose here is to provide his readers with real examples of individuals who used his principles to attain their vision in completely different ways.

Chapter Eight: Jeremy Moon, Founder and CEO of Icebreaker

Jeremy Moon founded Icebreaker, a small business focused on building a sustainable clothing industry using New Zealand’s biodegradable and renewable merino wool. Moon details his own experience before expressing how he used the concepts in Chopra’s book to reach successful visionary status.

Chapter Nine: Renata M. Black, Founding Director of Seven Bar Foundation

Renata M. Black is the Founding Director of Seven Bar Foundation, an organization which uses the profit made from selling luxury lingerie to provide microloans to women around the world. Black details her own journey through the seven levels of inspiring leadership and how she was able to sense a trend involving the social consciousness of consumers, and capitalize on it, to the benefit of impoverished women worldwide.

Part Three: Ten Principles of Leadership

Chapter Ten: A Template for Awareness

In the final section and chapter of *The Soul of Leadership*, Chopra summarizes all the lessons of his book in ten guidelines for awareness; (1) Leaders and followers co-create each other. (2) Just as individuals grow from the inside out, so do groups. (3) The outcome of any situation is defined in advance by the vision that goes into solving it. (4) The responses shared by leaders and followers are built into us, guiding us to evolve and progress. (5) Needs are designed to evolve, and a leader must be aware of this in order to foresee the future of the group and anticipate its needs. (6) For every need, a leader must play the right role. (7) The leader who understands the hierarchy of needs and responses will succeed; the leader who aims only for external goals (money, victory, power) will falter in the area that counts the most: guiding the evolution of his followers. (8) By ascending the hierarchy of needs, any group can be made to feel inspired and unified. Great leaders are in touch with every level of human experience. (9) Leading from the soul means giving of yourself. It means you supply trust, stability, compassion, and hope. (10) The soul brings order out of disorder. It brings creative leaps, unexpected answers, and synchronicities that are like gifts from the heart of mystery (pp. 214-216).

Target audience

It is evident that Chopra targets individuals who are in traditional leadership positions; especially businessmen and women, educators, politicians, and those who desire to make a change in the world through organizational means. I would also assert that his audience is general and varied, composed of individuals who could both be familiar with or new to leadership theory.

Application of the Material

As stated above, this text could be useful in conjunction with a variety of formalized leadership texts (e.g. Servant Leadership, Authentic Leadership, and Transformational Leadership); specifically, with students in leadership classes or programs. The general nature of Chopra's model works well with many well-known leadership models and texts. It could be used to help first and second-year students develop an individualized leadership definition, mission or personal values statements. Additionally, through critical examination of the text, upperclassmen could engage in deep conversation and reflection of their own leadership journey as a capstone to their undergraduate experience. Either way, this book provides a light, easy to understand, and fun way to conceptualize leadership for individuals to reflect on their own leadership.

Critique

Chopra's leadership model is packed full of recommendations, examples, strategies, and clear definitions that enable any interested party to glean a solid understanding of what he believes are necessary attributes of all *inspired leaders*. There are many positive lessons about leadership that Chopra conveys through his writing. The emphasis the author places on self-awareness, strong relationships between leaders and followers, the need for every leader to develop and understand their personal and organizational vision or purpose, and the commitment expected by each leader to the growth of their organization, vision, and personal empowerment are all important lessons for leaders today.

Considering the benefits of Chopra's book, we must also examine the areas where he falls short. Lacking any qualitative or quantitative research to back his assertions, his model lacks the validity that research-based and tested theories and models have. Much of what he claims to be true are completely unsupported within the text by anything other than his personal observation of others leadership success. For example, he states, "Current leadership training, almost anywhere you look for it, uses the word vision freely, but most often its basis is intellectual. Potential leaders are taught to use their minds to analyze various hypothetical scenarios. By leaving out feeling, intuition, insight, and the profound wisdom of the soul, this training falls short of its potential" (p. 29). While in some cases it may be accurate to say that current leadership training focuses on the intellectual, this is a broad assumption, supported neither by research nor demonstrated example.

Furthermore, while Chopra's language is easy to understand and provides for a quick read through the material, I often felt that the weight he placed on new age spiritualism and ideals watered down the basic components of his theory.

In *The Soul of Leadership: Unlocking Your Potential for Greatness* Chopra delivers a well-crafted, influential and unique set of suggestions for anyone. This book can serve a beneficial purpose for anyone interested in becoming more self-aware, developing their leadership style, and understanding what they wish to contribute to the world. If looking to employ this text for use in student leadership programs, it is important to consider the lacking of theoretical grounding, and pair it intentionally with validated theories. In conclusion, while this text may not provide the next ground-breaking leadership theory, it gives readers and opportunity to learn about themselves and leadership in a fun and interesting way.

Reviewer

Leslie Robinson is a first-year graduate student in the College Student Personnel Program at Bowling Green State University. She currently serves as the Graduate Program Assistant in the University Honors Program, where she serves as an academic and student organization advisor. Leslie graduated in 2008 from The Ohio State University with a degree in Anthropology.

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