

Farewell, Lofty Leadership . . .

Welcome, Engaging Management



**HENRY
MINTZBERG**
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STORIES FOR
MANAGERS**

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Bedtime Stories for Managers

Farewell to Lofty Leadership...

Welcome Engaging Management

Henry Mintzberg

All photographs by Lisa Mintzberg

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Bedtime Stories for Managers

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Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

1333 Broadway, Suite 1000

Oakland, CA 94612-1921

Tel: (510) 817-2277, Fax: (510) 817-2278

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www.bkconnection.com

Ordering information for print editions

Quantity sales. Special discounts are available on quantity purchases by corporations, associations, and others. For details, contact the “Special Sales Department” at the Berrett-Koehler address above.

Individual sales. Berrett-Koehler publications are available through most bookstores. They can also be ordered directly from Berrett-Koehler: Tel: (800) 929-2929; Fax: (802) 864-7626; www.bkconnection.com

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Distributed to the U.S. trade and internationally by Penguin Random House Publisher Services.

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First Edition

Paperback print edition ISBN 978-1-5230-9878-1

PDF e-book ISBN 978-1-5230-9879-8

IDPF e-book ISBN 978-1-5230-9880-4

Digital audio ISBN 978-1-5230-9882-8

2018-1

Book producer and text designer: BookMatters; copyeditor: Elizabeth von Radics; proofreader: Janet Reed Blake; indexer: Leonard Rosenbaum; cover designer: Dan Tesser/Studio Carnelian

COMING UP . . .

Good Evening... 1

About This Storyteller / The Tooth Fairies

ONE Stories of Managing 7

Managing Scrambled Eggs / The Maestro Myth of Managing / Managing to Lead / Selecting the Flawed Manager / The Epidemic of Managing without Soul / Managing in the Age of the Internet / Decision-Making: It's Not What You Think / Growing Strategies Like Weeds in a Garden

TWO Stories of Organizing 37

Organizing Like a Cow / Communityship beyond Leadership / Networks Are Not Communities / Transformation from the Top? Or Engagement on the Ground? / Species of Organizations / Why Do We Say "Top Management" but never "bottom management"? / Enough of Silos? How about Slabs? / Manageable and Unmanageable Managing / The Board as Bee

THREE	Stories of Analyzing	73
	Analyst: Analyze Thyself / Ye Gods: An Efficient Orchestra! / What Could Possibly Be Wrong with “Efficiency”? Plenty. / The Soft Underbelly of “Hard Data” / The Tricky Task of Measuring Managing / Evidence and Experience in Management, Medicine, and More / How National Happiness became gross	
FOUR	Stories about Development	97
	Jack’s Turn / MBAs as CEOs: Some Troubling Evidence / <u>Engage Managers Beyond Administration (“emba”)</u> / Don’t Just Sit There...	
FIVE	Stories in Context	119
	Managing Family Business / Global? How about Worldly? / Who Can Possibly Manage a Hospital? / Managing Government, Governing Management	
SIX	Stories about Responsibility	137
	A CEO’s Letter to the Board – long overdue / “Downsizing” as Twenty-First-Century Bloodletting / Productive and Destructive Productivity / The Scandal That Is a Syndrome / Please Welcome CSR 2.0	
SEVEN	Stories for Tomorrow	155
	The Extraordinary Power of Ordinary Creativity / Customer Service or serving customers? / Enough of MORE: Better Is Better / Be Good: The Best Is Too Low a Standard / Rise and Shine!	
	Notes	175
	Index	185



Good Evening...

Offline? Excellent. Welcome to *Bedtime Stories for Managers*, a playful book with a serious message: management has to come down from lofty leadership to grounded engagement. How so? By organizing like a cow instead of a chart...so that strategies can grow like weeds in a garden...as extraordinary ideas come from ordinary people...who are distinctively worldly instead of cookie-cutter global.

The first story sets the tone, telling how the CEO of a failing airline sat in First Class while his customers in back had to eat what was called scrambled eggs. In a world as scrambled as ours, managers have to eat those eggs.

A few years ago, I began a blog (mintzberg.org/blog) to capture a lifetime of ideas buried in obscure publications. Then I came across a book of stories for the fans of the Montreal hockey team, 101 in all. Perfect bedtime reading!—a little story or two before dozing off. Why not a book of blogs for managers? What better time than

now, by which I mean bedtime, after the managing has stopped – if it ever does.

Consider the organizations that you know and admire most:

- Do they function as collections of Human Resources or as communities of human beings?
- Does *thinking* always come first, or do they sometimes *see* first or *do* first in order to think better?
- Do they measure like mad or serve with soul?
- Must they *be* the best, or do they *do* their best?

If you opted for the first set of answers, read this book to discover the second. If you opted for the second set of answers, read this book to cope with those who opted for the first.

From more than 101 blogs, I selected 42 that seem to speak most meaningfully to managers. Books, I am told, need chapters, so I organized these under headings like *managing*, *organizing*, *analyzing*, and so on. I am also told that chapters need introductions to tell you what the writer is going to tell you. Here I drew the line: no introductions. I prefer that you discover these stories for yourself, in whatever order you prefer. I do ask that you read the first story first and the last story last, but otherwise feel free to peruse at random – as good managers sometimes do.

As you turn the pages, I'd like you to wonder what in the world is coming next. I'll give you a hint: a medley

of metaphors. Beside cows and gardens, cutting cookies and scrambling eggs, get ready for the maestro myth of managing, the soft underbelly of hard data, the board as bee, and downsizing as bloodletting. Just try not to be outraged by anything you read because some of my most outrageous ideas turn out to be my best. They just take time to become obvious.

This may be a book about managing, but don't expect any magic bullets. I leave those to the books that compound the problem. Instead expect unexpected insights to sleep on so that you can rise and shine and, after eating some properly scrambled eggs, charge out to unscramble the messes of managing. You, your colleagues, even your family might just live a little more happily ever after.

Sweet dreams!

About This Storyteller

I profess management and more at McGill University in Montreal (in the Cleghorn Chair of the Desautels Faculty), where I help managers develop themselves in business (impm.org), in health care (imhl.org), and in-house (CoachingOurselves.com). Otherwise I escape the world of organizations on skates, atop a bicycle, up mountains, and in my cherished canoe.

I guess I should tell you that I have 20 honorary degrees and am an Officer of the Order of Canada. (You can find other extraneous details at mintzberg.org, including [/beaver](#) to see my collection of proper art, [/books](#) to see



In my cherished canoe, with one of my cherished daughters

all mine, including a collection of horror stories about *The Flying Circus*, and /blog for new stories like the ones in this book.) I can add that this is my twentieth book—maybe the most serious—and my sixth with Berrett-Koehler. The focus of my attention now, hopefully before it's too late, is to help wake up the world to the implications of one of these books, called *Rebalancing Society*.

The Tooth Fairies

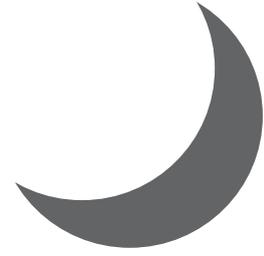
Once upon a time, in the faraway land of Berrett-Koehler, Katie urged me to do a blog, so I eventually did. Then Jeevan urged me to do a collection of my ideas, and thus came this book. Katie, again to the rescue, with Kris-

ten suggested that we call it *Bedtime Stories for Managers* (instead of *Managing Scrambled Eggs*), so we did that, too, again most happily. Steve, BK's engaging manager, engaged enthusiastically with this book, as have others of the BK team, including Lasell, Michael, David, Neil, Johanna, Maria Jesus, Catherine, and Chloe, plus those who contributed beyond BK: the other David, Ken, Jan, and Elizabeth.

Back home, Lisa has sprinkled magic over the stories with her sparkling photographs. Dulcie did her own magic, helping make so many of the blogs better, and Susie did likewise with edits of the manuscript. Mary has shepherded the whole process at this end, converting all the nightmares into sweet dreams, as Santa, the dream assistant, has been doing in my working life for 20 years.

I thank every one of you – tooth fairies all – for all the gems that you have been putting under my pillow for months on end.

*I dedicate this book to all those managers
who eat the scrambled eggs to help their
organization work like a cow.*



ONE

Stories of Managing

Big things and little things are my job.

Middle-level arrangements can be delegated.

—Kōnosuke Matsushita, founder of Panasonic

Managing Scrambled Eggs

One morning years ago, I flew Eastern Airlines from Montreal to New York. It was the largest airline in the world at the time but was soon to go belly-up.

They served food in those days, well, sort of—something they called “scrambled eggs.” I said to the flight attendant: “I’ve eaten some awfully bad things on airplanes, but this has to be the worst.”

“I know,” she replied. “We keep telling them; they won’t listen.”

How can this be? If they were running a cemetery, I could understand the difficulties of communicating with the customers. But an airline? Whenever I encounter awful service or a badly designed product, I wonder if the management is running the business or reading the financial statements.¹

The financial analysts were certainly reading those statements—and probably explaining the airline’s problem in terms of load factors and the like. Don’t believe a number of it. Eastern Airlines went belly-up because of those scrambled eggs.

Some years later, after telling this story to a group of managers, one of them, from IBM, came up to tell me another story: The CEO of Eastern Airlines came rushing in at the last minute for a flight, he said. First class was full, so they bumped a paying customer to put the CEO where I guess he had become accustomed. Apparently feeling guilty, he reportedly made his way to economy

class. (No mention was made of his having to ask where it was.) There he apologized to the customer and introduced himself as the CEO of the airline. The customer replied: "Well, I'm the CEO of IBM."

Now, don't get this wrong. The problem was not about *who* was bumped. Quite the contrary. Status was the problem: higher class counted for more than common sense. Managing is not about sitting where you have become accustomed. It's about eating the scrambled eggs.

The Maestro Myth of Managing

Picture the managerial maestro on the podium: a flick of the baton and marketing opens; a wave of the wand and sales chimes in; a grand sweep of the arms and HR, PR, and IT harmonize. It's a manager's dream—you can even attend leadership workshops orchestrated by conductors.²



Here are three quotes about this metaphor. As you read them, we'll play a little game. Please vote for which quote best captures your understanding of managing. But there's a trick: you must vote after you read each, before you have read any other. There is, however, a compensating trick: you can vote up to three times!

From Peter Drucker, the guru's guru:

One analogy [for the manager] is the conductor of a symphony orchestra, through whose effort, vision and leadership individual instrumental parts that are so much noise by themselves become the living whole of music. But the conductor has the composer's score: he is only interpreter. The manager is both composer and conductor.³

Your vote for the manager as composer and conductor?
From Sune Carlson, a Swedish economist who carried out the first serious study of managerial work of Swedish CEOs:

Before we made the study, I always thought of a chief executive as the conductor of an orchestra, standing aloof on his platform. Now I am in some respects inclined to see him as the puppet in the puppet-show with hundreds of people pulling the strings and forcing him to act in one way or another.⁴

Your vote for the manager as puppet?
From Leonard Sayles, who studied middle managers in the United States:

The manager is like a symphony orchestra conductor, endeavoring to maintain a melodious performance... while the orchestra members are having various personal difficulties, stage hands are moving music stands, alternating excessive heat and cold are creating audience

and instrumental problems, and the sponsor of the concert is insisting on irrational changes in the program.⁵

Your vote for the manager in rehearsal?

I have used this game with many groups of managers. The results are always the same: a few hands might go up for the first and a few more for the second, but when I read the third, all the hands go up! Managers are like orchestra conductors, all right, but away from performance, to the everyday grind. Beware of metaphors that glorify.

As for orchestra conductors, are they managers at all, even leaders? Outside of performance, certainly both, together. They select the musicians and the music and, during rehearsals, blend them into a coherent whole. But watch a conductor in performance: it is mostly that—performance. Better still, watch the musicians during performance: they barely look at the conductor—who, by the way, may be a guest conductor. Can you imagine a guest manager anywhere else?⁶

Who is pulling the strings: Toscanini or Tchaikovsky? Actually, the musicians do that, but each plays the notes written for their instrument by the composer, all together. So it is the composer who is both composer and conductor. But since the composers are dead, the conductors get the acclaim.

Maybe all the world really is a stage, with all the composers, conductors, managers, and players merely players. If so, no manager belongs on the podium of lofty leadership.