

An Excerpt From

The Heart of Leadership
Becoming a Leader People Want to Follow

by Mark Miller

Published by Berrett-Koehler Publishers

The Heart of Leadership

Becoming a Leader People
Want to Follow

Mark Miller

Coauthor of
the international bestseller *The Secret*

Foreword by Patrick
Lencioni

More Praise for *The Heart of Leadership*

“*The Heart of Leadership* addresses the primary stumbling block for leaders—their selves! If you want to improve how you lead others, you must first improve how you lead yourself. This great little book shows you how.”

—**Daniel S. Harkavy, CEO, author, and Executive Coach, Building Champions, Inc.**

“*The Heart of Leadership* extends and deepens the bestselling leadership models pioneered by Mark Miller. This book is clear, compelling, and of real practical value. Keep it on hand—a small investment of time will yield a lifetime of dividends, in your life as well as in your career.”

—**Jeff Rosensweig, Associate Professor of International Business and Finance and Director, Global Perspectives Program, Goizueta Business School, Emory University**

“There’s a difference between potential leaders with raw talent and great leaders with real influence. Mark’s book reveals the foundational difference—it’s all about leadership character.”

—**Tony Morgan, author and Chief Strategic Officer and founder of TonyMorganLive.com**

“Mark Miller’s *The Heart of Leadership* immediately creates a place for personal discovery. As I read each page, I was no longer thinking of Blake, the main character, but myself. Blake’s journey of discovery became my own. This is about the ‘life’ of leadership and how it reaches within and without, having profound and long-lasting impact. It’s about being unselfishly driven and highly motivated. It is about how others within the workplace and within our lives benefit from our personal resolve to lead from the perspective that others matter.”

—**Clifton L. Taulbert, author of *Eight Habits of the Heart* and President, The Freemount Corporation/Building Community Institute**

“There are so many buzzwords in business that claim to be the answer to all leadership woes. The truth is that leadership is all about the people, and to have success with people, read *The Heart of Leadership*, and watch your leadership soar to a whole new level.”

—**Todd Nielsen, author and COO, JMARK Business Solutions**

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The
Heart of
Leadership

OTHER BOOKS BY MARK MILLER

The Secret of Teams

The Secret of Teams Field Guide

With Ken Blanchard

Great Leaders Grow

The Secret

The Heart of Leadership

Becoming a Leader People
Want to Follow

Mark Miller



BK

Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
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a BK Business book

The Heart of Leadership

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Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
235 Montgomery Street, Suite 650
San Francisco, California 94104-2916
Tel: (415) 288-0260, Fax: (415) 362-2512
www.bkconnection.com

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First Edition

Hardcover print edition ISBN 978-1-60994-960-0

PDF e-book ISBN 978-1-60994-961-7

IDPF e-book ISBN 978-1-60994-962-4

2013-1

Production Management: Michael Bass Associates

Cover Design: Irene Morris

To Mom and Dad:
Your love, challenge, encouragement,
and prayers have marked me and
my leadership forever.
Thank you!

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Foreword

Leadership has been the subject of so many books, studies, and commencement speeches that many people have started to ignore the importance of the message. And, to be fair, authors and speakers often rehash the same clichés and obvious truths, leaving readers and audience members searching for something new.

But maybe it's not something new that we need. Maybe we only need to take a longer, harder look at what we already know but have failed to grasp—the simple but painful truth that if your heart is not right, no one cares about your leadership skills.

In *The Heart of Leadership*, Mark Miller makes a compelling case for a radical form of leadership. According to my dictionary, radical means “favoring extreme changes in existing views, habits, conditions, or institutions.” And, Mark's ideas around the heart of leadership just do not correspond to the more self-oriented views, habits, and conditions of today's culture.

This book also illustrates the idea that there is much more to the concept of leadership than most people realize. As the main character in the story comes to understand, wisdom, responsibility, and courage are not generic, fluffy or simplistic concepts that any leader can easily embrace. They can only be achieved through a radical detachment from self, through a painful honesty about our past mistakes and limitations. Anything short of that will leave an aspiring leader, and his or her constituents, feeling empty.

For those who have the courage and the character to embrace the radical nature of heart-based leadership, the rewards are great. But those rewards are not always tangible nor are they guaranteed. They cannot be calculated like a bonus or a 401(k) program. That may be why relatively few leaders choose to lead this way. But perhaps this book will begin to change that. I certainly hope so.

—Patrick Lencioni
President, The Table Group
Author, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*
and *The Advantage*



INTRODUCTION

Leadership Character

Have you ever noticed how many books are written to help leaders improve? As many books as there are out there focused on helping leaders enhance their skills, there are far fewer written to help the leader with the all-important self-work—the part on the inside. That’s why I’m excited about this book.

I’ll let you in on a little discussed fact about leadership: As important as the skills are, lack of skills is not what derails most leaders; skills are too easy to learn. If you want to predict people’s ultimate success as leaders, evaluate not their skills but their **leadership character**.

The challenge of growing our leadership character is complicated by a lack of clarity as to what we’re actually discussing when the term is used. Ask people what character traits they look for in leaders, and I’m guessing they will probably name attributes like integrity, honesty, and, perhaps, loyalty. These alone are not a great answer. Don’t get me wrong—these are fine traits, but they are totally inadequate when describing leadership character.

The best leaders must certainly be honest and have integrity, but we expect these qualities from everyone in our organizations. There are additional traits that set leaders apart. This book is about identifying and developing leadership character. When these traits are evident—and a leader possesses the requisite leadership skills—you find people eager to follow.

So, why is a book like this necessary? This book is intended to help leaders and aspiring leaders strengthen their leadership character, and, as a consequence, position themselves for greater opportunity, influence, and impact. For some of you, the ideas in this book may help transform your leadership and unlock opportunities as you've never imagined. It might even change your life.

If you and I can embrace and cultivate the leadership character traits outlined in this simple story and master the skills needed to lead, our organizations will soar. It will require both—character and skills. Let's begin the hard part today: leadership character first.



Leaders Are Different

“Leaders are different,” Samantha said.

“That’s it?” Blake said in a tone that revealed his concern.

“Yes, Blake. Your performance has been outstanding; you’re a great individual contributor, but I couldn’t get enough support for you to become the team leader.”

“That doesn’t make sense to me,” said Blake, in disbelief. “Outstanding performance—no promotion.”

“That’s right. We do value results around here—but there’s something missing.” Samantha stopped.

Blake leaned across the table, waiting on her next words, but she said nothing.

He finally broke the silence, “What’s missing?” He wanted to know—he needed to know.

“It’s really hard for me to put it into words,” she said hesitantly. “That’s why I said leaders are different.”

“Can you tell me how leaders are different?” Blake asked.

“I’m not sure how to describe it, but I know it when I see it.” Samantha sounded uncertain.

“Samantha, are you trying to tell me that I’ll never get a promotion?” Blake wasn’t sure he even wanted the answer to that question.

“No, Blake, I’m not. However, there is a lot more to leadership than great individual work . . . you’re just not *acting* like a leader,” she said, in a genuine attempt to help.

*There is a lot more to leadership
than great individual work.*

“How do I act like a leader?” Blake’s frustration was starting to show.

“Leaders are different.”

“Yes, I got that.” Blake was hanging on Samantha’s every word. He waited, but Samantha didn’t seem to have anything else to say. Blake decided one final question was in order: “Do you have any advice for me?”

“You need to figure this out for yourself. You know a lot of leaders; why don’t you talk to some of them and see if they can help?”

Samantha wasn’t totally satisfied with her response, but she hoped Blake would take her counsel. He did seem to have a lot of potential.

. . .

As Blake drove home, he replayed the previous five years at Dynastar in his head. He felt as if he’d gotten off to a

fast start, maybe the fastest start in history. He had practically saved the company in his first year—single-handedly. But since then, he had moved three times within the company and been passed over twice for leadership positions. He was only 28 years old, but he felt much older. He was tired. He was stuck. And now he had to tell Megan.

As he pulled in the driveway, he thought, I wish we didn't have such a big house payment, then this promotion and the raise wouldn't seem so important. He also hoped that Megan was in a good mood. Maybe she had gotten a nap today.

As he entered the house, Clint, their nine-month old, was screaming about something. None of them had been sleeping much, and Megan didn't look like she'd had a nap.

"How are you?" Blake asked, mustering as much of a smile as he could.

"Okay," Megan said, "I'm tired." As she spoke, she stepped into the light.

"Have you been crying?" he asked.

"A little."

"Why?"

"The doctor called—" She stopped.

"And . . . ?" Blake probed.

"I'm pregnant!" Megan burst into tears.

"Great," Blake said, with little emotion.

"Great? You're never home, we don't sleep, and we can hardly pay the bills. What's great about another child?"

The part about “hardly pay the bills” hit Blake like an arrow to his heart. He decided to let it go even though it hurt him deeply.

“Listen,” he said. “Another child is a wonderful gift! We’ll sleep again someday. And I’ll make more money—someday. And about my never being home, I’ll keep working on that part, too.”

He paused and then said, “I’m thankful we’re having another baby. We always talked about having another one.”

“We were going to do that later,” she sobbed.

“It will be okay.” Blake hugged Megan as tightly as he ever had.

When she stopped crying, he said, “You go lie down and take a quick nap. I’ll take care of Clint and fix us something to eat. I’ll call you in an hour.”

“Thank you” was all that Megan could say, as she shuffled off to the bedroom. A nap was the greatest gift Blake could have given her in that moment.

An hour later, much had changed, or at least it felt like it. Clint was happy, Megan was a little more rested and relaxed, and Blake had made a wonderful dinner—well, he had cooked a frozen pizza.

When Megan came back into the kitchen, she said, “I’m sorry I was so emotional earlier. You’re right, we do want another child, and there’s probably never a good time.” She smiled, “Plus, the stress that comes with not

sleeping makes everything look more monumental than it really is.”

“Here’s what I know,” Blake added. “It will be great! It may be bumpy, but it will be good.” Megan had always loved Blake’s optimism.

“How was work today?” Megan asked.

“Well . . . ” Blake really didn’t want to go there.

The timing seemed extremely bad. “It was fine,” he said.

“Uh-oh,” Megan said. Blake was not a good liar.

“You do still have a job, don’t you?”

“Certainly. What would make you think I don’t have a job?” Blake was thankful he did still have a job; perhaps that would make the next part easier.

“I do have a job. I don’t have a promotion,” he said in a matter-of-fact tone.

“I’m sorry, dear.” Megan could feel his pain. “What’d they say?”

“I do great work . . . ”

“Yes, but?”

“But leaders are different.”

“What does that mean?” Megan asked.

“I don’t really know. I’ve only had a couple of hours to think about it. I think they’re telling me I’m not a leader.”

“You’ve always been one before.” Megan instinctively came to Blake’s defense.

“Yes, I know. But Dynastar seems to have a different standard of leadership. I’m still trying to figure it out.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Three things,” Blake said. “Keep working hard. Keep trying to grow, and I’m going to call Debbie Brewster.”

“You do all that,” Megan said, “and I’ll pray.” She smiled; Blake didn’t.



When the Student Is Ready

The next morning Clint was up early, so Blake was up early also. While he drank his coffee, he thought about how much Debbie Brewster had helped him after his dad died. He still found it amazing that his dad had mentored Debbie years earlier when she was a struggling leader and then she had then become his mentor.

He credited Debbie with helping him get his job at Dynastar by coaching him through the entire process. She had taught him so much about growing as a leader. He wasn't sure where he'd gotten off track. He was also not sure why he ever stopped meeting with her in the first place. He hoped that she could help him again.

On his way to the office, he gave her a call. Fortunately, but not surprisingly, she was eager to meet with him.

"You name the time and place," Debbie said.

"How about our old spot at the coffee shop?" Blake said.

"Fantastic. When?"

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