

1-2015

Leadership and the Art of Struggle: How Great Leaders Grow Through Challenge and Advertsity

Iosef Salajan

Romanian Adventist Temple, Hollywood, FL

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jacl>

 Part of the [Leadership Studies Commons](#), and the [Organizational Behavior and Theory Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Salajan, Iosef (2015) "Leadership and the Art of Struggle: How Great Leaders Grow Through Challenge and Advertsity," *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*: Vol. 9: No. 1, 112-114.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jacl/vol9/iss1/13>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Applied Christian Leadership by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact repository@andrews.edu.

Caveats to this book include the fact that those who would benefit the most from what Shirvani writes are also the least likely to be aware of or acknowledge their need to manage their egos. Additionally, in my opinion, the title of the book is somewhat deceptive because it suggests a confrontational relationship between ego and EQ when, in fact, those with healthy egos are most likely to have a well-developed EQ. Another potential drawback of this book is one that is true for many: the value of the guidance that Shirvani provides will be determined almost entirely by how effectively each reader applies what he or she learns.

In conclusion, Shirvani points out that there will be many instances in the process of leadership where the leader simply cannot control the outcome or the end product. What a leader can control are interactions with one's team. A leader can choose to lead from an unconscious place driven by ego or to lead intentionally with EQ at the forefront. Being aware of the areas where ego may tend to result in poor leadership can allow a leader to be authentic and to practice emotionally intelligent leadership. Shirvani urges readers to remember that "it's not about changing who you are, but instead opening your eyes to some of your blind spots and being courageous enough to make a few small but incredibly powerful changes" (p. 158). Since Shirvani's work opens the door for leaders to identify their own ego traps and provides simple actions to remedy those traps, I would recommend this book to leaders who want to avoid the traps that ego can cause and to lead in a way that capitalizes on EQ. Many of the principles embraced in this book mirror those that a Christian leader would want to use as he or she seeks to live by the Golden Rule.

References

- Goleman, D. (2006). *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ* (10th Anniversary ed.). New York, NY: Bantam.
- Salovey, P., Brackett, M. A., & Mayer, J. D. (2004). *Emotional intelligence: Key readings on the Mayer and Salovey model*. Port Chester, NY: Dude.

ROBERT OVERSTREET is principal at Andrews Academy in Berrien Springs, Michigan, and studies leadership at Andrews University.

LEADERSHIP AND THE ART OF STRUGGLE: HOW GREAT LEADERS GROW THROUGH CHALLENGE AND ADVERSITY

by Steven Snyder

San Francisco, CA: Barrett-Koehler (2013)

Paperback, 244 pages

Reviewed by IOSIF SALAJAN

In *Leadership and the Art of Struggle*, Steven Snyder combines personal experience and academic research with 151 real-life stories of struggling leaders, well-known or less famous, in the desire to illustrate that struggle is crucial to effective leadership. In Snyder's view, struggle often "unlocks the potential for the greatest growth" (p. 3), a lesson that he has learned from 30 years of leadership experience. This abundance of examples of leaders who were able to overcome their own difficulties will have a beneficial impact on the reader. In recounting these stories, Snyder insightfully addresses the psychological background of the issues and shows the practical way out of the deadlocks.

Snyder points out "three fundamental conditions that determine the nature of the struggle and serve as its defining elements: change, tensions, and being out of balance" (p. 22). Behind every struggle, there is a change that inevitably creates ten-

sions. It is critical for the leader to be aware that change and tension together can easily throw him out of balance.

The author approaches the problem of failure and adversities from an interdisciplinary perspective that includes anthropology, metaphysics, and neuroscience. In an attempt to create a system that helps the reader understand how struggles can become growth opportunities, Snyder connects earlier observations (e.g., Joseph L. Badaracco's conclusions on leadership as human endeavors of fictional heroic characters) with more recent scientific research, such as Daniel Kahneman's *Thinking, Fast and Slow*.

The book opens with an insightful foreword written by Harvard professor Bill George, in which he reflects on his personal pathway toward an accomplished life career. The actual content of the book is structured in three major parts. In Part I, *Becoming Grounded*, Snyder offers a list of "scripts" commonly followed during struggles and describes some grounding practices. Part II, *Explore New Pathways*, focuses on the use of a "struggle lens" in finding new and creative ways out of the struggle. In the final section—Part III, *Deepening Adapting Energy*—the author teaches the leader how to fully unfold her potential through deepening practices. At the end of the book, the reader can also find some additional resources, notes, acknowledgments, an index, and bibliographical data about the author.

One of Snyder's key concepts is "adaptive energy." "Adaptive energy," he says, "is the force that propels you to reach your dreams, aligns your actions both with the external criteria necessary for success and with your inner values and principles" (p. 31). He suggests that the struggling leader should adopt a growth mindset rather than a fixed mindset; the graphic rep-

resentation on page 47 is particularly instructive for his point.

Especially helpful is Snyder's extensive explanation of how to recognize and overcome "blind spots." For him, "blind spots are the product of an overactive automatic mind and an underactive reflective mind" (p. 129). Conflict is one of the most problematic blind spots that distort the leader's relational perception.

On the practical side, Snyder proposes a large number of grounding, exploring and deepening self-reflection activities. Perhaps one of the most beneficial tools he prescribes is a tension map that is designed to scrutinize four major aspects of life: relationships, identity, traditions, and aspirations. This self-assessment exercise will uncover the true face of the leader and will help him better manage tension that could lead to an out-of-balance state.

Leadership and the Art of Struggle is an easy-to-read leadership book; the language is accessible for both professionals and amateurs. For those with academically structured minds, the large amount of narrative in the many illustrative stories might seem to dilute the reading. And yet, this is precisely one of the strengths of the book.

Snyder not only describes the art of struggle, but also shows how it works a positive change in the life of real characters. From a psychological standpoint, this has a powerful humanizing impact on the reader. It reinforces the indisputable truth that, no matter how famous, a leader is still a human. As George states in his foreword, "only in acknowledging our own flaws and vulnerabilities can we become authentic leaders who empower people to perform to the best of their abilities" (p. x).

By and large, as a secular writer, Snyder does justice to his topic. However, we must notice that his

work lacks the supernatural dimension of divine intervention in the struggling situation of the leader. As one reads this book, it is easy to get the impression at some points that the author is appealing to the reader's ego, suggesting that through the right attitude and means the leader can work herself out of any kind of trouble. For Christian readers, I would recommend as complementary reading Henry and Richard Blackaby's book *Spiritual Leadership*, especially Chapter 12, "The Leader's Pitfalls: What Disqualifies Leaders?"

Leadership and the Art of Struggle is a valuable book, worth the read for anybody aiming to master the intricate art of struggle. It is instructive and encouraging; I recommend it to both leaders and potential leaders.

IOSIF SALAJAN serves as pastor of the Romanian Adventist Temple in Hollywood, Florida.