

Bad Leadership: What It Is, How It Happens, Why it Matters.

Kellerman, B. (2004). Harvard Business School Press (www.hbsp.harvard.edu/), 282 pp., \$26.95 (Hardcover).

This book challenges conventional thinking that suggests the activity of leading requires goodness, competence, and courage. This book compels us to consider, analyze and learn from bad leadership. It requires us to look at the human behavior of leadership in all its forms, including those that are not so flattering, and argues that bad leadership is all around us and that the only way to better address it is to study it, analyze it, learn from it, and finally, take action against it. It offers an outstanding compilation of noteworthy business and political leaders who have caused harm to those around them, both near and far. It is written in a structured and cohesive manner to allow the reader to understand that leadership is “just one strand of a web that constitutes the leadership process.”

The book is divided into three parts and has a total of 12 chapters. In Part One, “The Bad Side,” there are three chapters, Claiming The Bad Side, Reasons For Being Bad; and Making Meaning Of Being Bad. This part addresses human behavior and leadership. In “Claiming The Bad Side,” the author speaks to the need to define and look at bad leadership. She argues that for far too long, the term “leadership” has been synonymous with “good” leadership. She proposes that all leaders must be studied, whether they used their power and authority for good or whether they were “power wielders” who served their own purpose and greed. In the second chapter, “Reasons For Being Bad,” Kellerman offers a philosophical, historical and psychological perspective of leadership. She endeavors to explain the reasons that leaders behave badly, the reasons that we follow leaders who behave badly, and the reasons that followers behave badly. In “Making Meaning of Being Bad” (Chapter 3), she offers a model to better understand bad leadership. This model puts bad leadership on two axes, Ineffective Leadership and Unethical Leadership, and suggests that these are more than just theoretical constructs. These are empirical constructs which are later illustrated. She identifies seven types of bad leadership: Incompetent, Rigid, Intemperate, Callous, Corrupt, Insular, and Evil.

In Part Two, “Leading Badly,” Kellerman provides seven chapters, one for each bad leadership type: Incompetent, Rigid, Intemperate, Callous, Corrupt, Insular, and Evil. These chapters are extremely well written, particularly in regard to their structure and content. Each chapter follows an outline of subsections which allows the reader to easily relate one chapter to previous and subsequent chapters and better understand bad leadership. Each chapter begins with an introduction, offers brief examples, and then identifies one bad leader as its main focus for the particular type of bad leadership. The subsections include: The Prologue, Context, The Leader, The Followers, The Web, and The Benefit of Hindsight. Chapters four through ten read as a “Who’s Who” of bad leadership, each discussing its respective bad leadership style.

Chapter Four: “Incompetent”, offers a review of the leadership styles of Juan Antonio Samaranch, president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), who was disgraced because of the wide spread corruption among members of the IOC; Abdurrahman Wahid, former president of Indonesia, the world’s fourth most populous

country, who after his capricious management style, inconsistent policies and erratic behavior, he was ousted after only 22 months in office; Jill Barad, briefly CEO of Mattel Inc. the largest and most successful toy company in the United States, who was ousted because of a failed merger.

Chapter Five: “Rigid”, identifies the leadership styles of Mary Meeker, opinion leader at the Wall Street firm Morgan Stanley Dean Witter & Co, who ignored information that the tech bubble of the 1990’s was bursting and continued to recommend tech stock long after they had become risky; Robert Hass, former CEO of Levi Strauss & Co., who failed to see the implications of the global economy on his company; Sumner Redstone, CEO of Viacom, the media corporation, who failed to effectively address the issue of succession planning; Vladimir Putin, President of Russia, who failed to respond in a timely manner to the Kursk submarine disaster. Chapter Six: “Intemperate”, discusses the leadership styles of Marion Barry Jr., former mayor of Washington, D.C., who was tainted by drug use scandals; Gary Hart and Jesse Jackson, American politicians who were tainted by sexscandals; James Bakker, televangelist who was tainted by financial corruption; Henry Lyons, televangelist who was tainted by sex scandals; William Bennett, author of “The Book Of Virtues” and self appointed warrior of the culture wars, who was tainted by his own gambling behavior.

Chapter Seven: “Callous”, considers the leadership styles of Al Dunlap, former CEO of Sunbeam Corporation also know as “Chainsaw Al”, who due to the short sighted way he managed corporate restructuring created a fiasco for Sunbeam share holders and employees; Rudolph Giuliani, former mayor of New York City, who, prior to 9/11 which changed how he was perceived, was seen as callous and unresponsive to members of the minority community in New York City, particularly African Americans; Leona Helmsley, brash and capricious real estate mogul, who served time in prison for tax evasion; Howell Raines, former executive editor of the New York Times, whose autocratic and callous management style during several scandals at the newspaper led to his termination.

Chapter Eight: “Corrupt”, assesses the leadership styles of William Aramony, former head of the United Way, who was forced to resign because of his accounting and management practices; Vincent (Buddy) Cianci Jr., former mayor of Providence, Rhode Island, who was convicted of racketeering conspiracy; Mario Villanueva, former governor of the Mexican state of Quintana Roo, who was charged with shipping cocaine to the United States, drug trafficking, and money laundering; Andrew Fastow, former CFO of Enron, who pleaded guilty to two felonies relating to the accounting practices which contributed in the collapse of Enron.

Chapter Nine: “Insular”, describes the leadership styles of Bill Clinton, former president of the United States, who failed to respond to the crisis in Rwanda; Lee Raymond, president of the Exxon Mobil Corporation, who failed to engage or demonstrate concern for anyone outside Exxon Mobil; James W. Johnston, former CEO of R. J. Reynolds Tobacco, who adamantly insisted that cigarette smoking and nicotine were not addictive long after the data had proved otherwise.

Chapter Ten: “Evil”, details the leadership styles of Radovan Karadzic, first president of the Bosnian Serb Administration, who permitted the widespread genocide of Bosnian Muslims; Saddam Hussein, former president of Iraq, who was responsible for murder, torture, genocide, ethnic cleansing and use of chemical weapons against his own people; Jim Jones and David Koresh, cult leaders and dictators, who caused or contributed to the deaths of their loyal followers.

In Part Three, “From Bad To Better,” there are two chapters, Costs And Benefits and Comments And Corrections, that clarify the short and long term consequences of bad leadership and offers suggestions regarding what can be done regarding bad leadership. In “Costs And Benefits” (Chapter 11), Kellerman looks at the ongoing costs of bad leadership and the benefits of its study. It argues, quite convincingly, that bad leadership has a lingering and multigenerational effect. The benefits of study rely on our ability to identify and understand patterns of human behavior and bad leadership, so that we will better be able to confront it early in its genesis. In Chapter 12, “Comments and Corrections,” she offers hope that bad leaders can be made better or at least their harmful effects can be slowed. Additionally, it offers prescriptive suggestions to leaders and followers to remediate the development of bad leadership.

This book should be considered a must read for anyone who has ever been interested in learning about leadership. It is well written, clear, instructive, and offers information in a well thought out format, unlike many books in this genre. It offers a structure which can be applied to many leaders currently on the world stage, and probably some of the leadership styles many of us experience every day. Finally, it offers concrete suggestions for leaders and followers to consider in order avoid the perils of bad leadership.

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