

The Allure of Toxic Leaders

By JEAN LIPMAN-BLUMEN

An Executive Book Summary by
Anar Usubov

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About the Book

The book gives us a detailed description of Toxic Leaders and *The Allure* of those leaders. Why toxic leaders -from Enron's Ken Lay and Jeff Skilling, Catholic Church's Cardinal Bernard Law to the Italian media mogul and former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi, as well as automotive giant Henry Ford, for starters- fascinate and attract followers. It gives us answers of the questions about the imprints from our childhood and our shared human condition that leave us vulnerable to destructive leaders, to the Maos and Hitlers who stride the international stage, as well as to everyday organizational tyrants. Many internal and external factors play role in this process. Psychological, existential needs, political and socio-economic crises, cultural and historical norms, traditions play a role in this dynamic. It does not blame the victim, but it takes a serious look at followers' ordinary needs: the yearning of for certainty in an uncertain world, for self-esteem, heroism, access to centers of action, opportunities to engage in noble enterprises and the promise of immortality. This book doesn't stop there. It teaches us pragmatic strategies for liberating ourselves from the traps of that toxic leaders lay for us. How we can free ourselves both individually and collectively. These options range from confronting and counseling the leader to prodding the leader to reform, and if that doesn't work unseating him. It describes the importance of setting limits on the tenure of leaders to prevent their turning toxic. It examines respectable departure possibilities for leaders who have overstayed their usefulness. The problems toxic leaders pose for their followers are escalating. To address them, we must take a long, hard, but useful look at ourselves, at the world in which we live, at the leaders who seduce us, and the possibilities for surviving despite the allure of toxic leaders.

“Unhappy the land that has no heroes.

No, unhappy the land that is in need of heroes.”

-Bertolt Brecht



The Big Picture

Toxic leaders are plentiful. We may grouse about toxic leaders, but frequently we tolerate them-for long periods of time. These intriguing leaders first charm but then they manipulate, mistreat, undermine, and ultimately leave their followers worse off than they found them. Not only their close entourage -the leader's close-in staff and advisors, but also of the large mass of supporters are influenced by those toxic behaviors. *Sometimes toxicity act of commission, sometimes one of omission.*

Toxic leadership crosses geographical borders in a single leap. Josef Stalin, Augusto Pinochet in Chile, Indira Ghandi, Slobadan Milosevic are the examples of toxic and nontoxic leaders. It offers multicultural, multi-ethnic, multi-racial equal opportunity career path. As it turned out, toxic leadership proves historically durable. Old Testament suggests that it has been around King David. British Monarch Henry VIII, American Industrialist Henry Ford, wielded toxic leaders.



The paradox of cynicism: The leaders longevity plays a very crucial role in whole processes. Beside this, the media's myopia effects on the leaders. Media assess leaders as a "rising stars", "gurus", "fallen angels", that infiltrate the public consciousness significantly shaping the attitudes of impressionable leader-in-waiting, who mistake them for role models such as Fidel Castro, Henry Ford.

Hence with, two factors play a role: Media legitimate watchdog function on its profit motive-increase the fourth estate's attention to toxic leader once they are unmasked. Somehow it turned out that between 1944-2003 Amazon sold 2.067 books about Hitler.

Leaders and

Followers : **Action, Interaction and Inaction**

Leadership is an interaction between leaders and their supporters. What influences followers to tolerate-sometimes for decades -leaders who deceive, denigrate, and even destroy them.

How to recognize toxic leaders!"Acting as or having the effect of a poison"

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Followers suffer poisonous when leaders place their own well-being above their supporter's needs. Toxic leaders who engage in numerous destructive behaviors and who exhibit certain dysfunctional personal characteristics.

Toxic Behaviors:How toxic leaders act Leaving their followers (non-followers) worse off than they found them,sometimes eliminating -by deliberately

undermining,demeaning,seducing,killing Violating basic standards of human rights

Constant feeding their followers illusions that enhance leader's power

Playing to the basest fears and needs of the followers

Misleading the followers through deliberate untruths and diagnoses of issues and problems.

Some toxic leaders use scare resources to build monuments to themselves rather than to meet their

followers basic needs.Opulent executive suits,Corporate gets ,Saddam Hussein of Iraq maintained multi-billion dollar palace construction program while his people went hungry,silly and shabby treatment at the bottom of followers

heap.Usually elites receive white-glove treatment

Toxic Leaders:What they are like personal qualities and characteristics.Most of them are

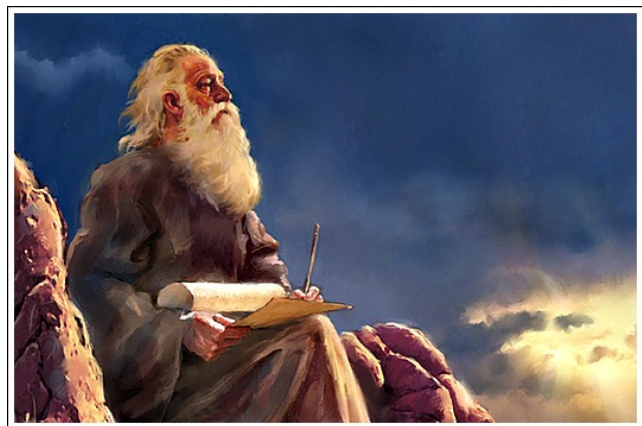
cynical,greed,corrupt.

What are the forces that propel followers,again and again,to accept often favor,and sometimes create toxic leaders?

Within ourselves: Psychological needs that make us seek leaders.1.Reassuring authority figures to fill our parent's shoes.2.Security,certainty 3.Membership in the human community 4.Isolation,social death, ostracism 5.Fear to challenge a bad leader.

Replacing our parent figures: The yearning to fill the vacuum left by a parental authority prompts us to accept controlling leaders.

We begin to search for replacements.We do often exchange our freedom for security.Toxic leaders ,who promise us security and assure us that we are special or "chosen".Many religious and ethnic leaders have fed their followers hunger for security with the belief that they are alone are the "chosen"people (Moses,Calvin)



"Every conflict over the truth is just the same old struggle over immortality"

Our need for Community: We have an intense need to belong membership in an elite group!Our fear of ‘social death’ is more than physical death. We are all social animals according to Plato”Incapable of living alone”.Our search of personal weakness help toxic leaders maintain control.”After all I am just one person.I have no power.How can you expect me to change the world?”We passively surrender to such leaders.We challenge ourselves.Many of us wish to confront the boss but only after we had changed companies.If we find someone agrees with us we can turn into outspoken dissidents.

How toxic leaders play on our fears?:They file dossiers and fire objectors.They deplete oxygens of objectors.(Former FBI head M).We fight back by organizing ourselves and others.Trade Unions are the best example.Our individual psychological needs drawn from experiences with parents and caretakers can leave us vulnerable to toxic leaders.

The impossible search for security perhaps a savior to cope with our existential dilemma to minimize that potentially overwhelming anxiety,we do more than simply look for leaders.

Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi portrayed himself as the of Italian democracy,there is no one else today in Italy the ability to prevent.”*We are all looking for saviors*”

How leaders mislead:Be-aware leaders bearing gifts:One group of toxic leaders The Taliban dicted to eliminate farming of poppies,Afghanistan largest cash crop.But it was done to seduce followers and outsiders by the illusionary gift of safety insured by a policy of authoritarianism.They diverted critic's attention from that toxic act by presenting them with a grand gift,they offer a gift that critics can't refuse,a gift that also silences them.When world's attention shifts elsewhere however,the gift quietly disappears.

Leaders want to be at the center too.Being at the center provides them with a raison d'etre,a sense of big virtually alive full-filling destiny.According to Hitler it is a source of life.

Napoleon: “There is no immortality except memories left in the minds of men”



The desire to identify noble vision. The terrorists who rejoiced at transforming New York into an inferno on 9/11 were guided by their leader's "noble vision" of destroying infidels. A world of uncertainties and changes versus a world of certainties and stability, two major types of external forces that increases both our fears and our wish for someone to take charge; another shapes our particular response to leaders.

The web of cultural certainties: Many individuals surrender their freedom to any leader who will promise them four things

- A new demanding ideology with a clear set of beliefs and rules to replace those shattered freedom
- A rationale for the new social order and schedule of costs and rewards, no matter how illusionary
- A continuing relationship with-even submission to a seemingly omnipotent leader, who "promises" to put the newly freed followers back in a secure box, albeit a different box

The certainties of culture shaping our expectations for leaders. The formal and informal structures of our society bias us toward keeping the current leader in power. Social norms shape our ways of selecting and responding to leaders. But they can be changed. Each era teaches us its genetic special lessons: caution, distrust, and fear, or alternatively daring, optimism, faith and ebullience. Long-scale demographic, political trends have their own effects on followers appetites for challenging bad leaders.

Cultural myths and beliefs: Toxic leaders misuse all aspects of culture. The culture plays a role in selecting leaders. So we easily see how culture followed blindly, in organizations as well as in the larger society, can set up followers to accept toxic leadership. We look to leaders. usually strong leaders for reassurance, guidance and a sense of meaning in our lives. We condone the entry of toxic leaders. We seek them out and anoint them as God.

Leadership in Crisis: The dangers of creating God We want leaders who will slay the dragons that beset us so that we can once again sleep peacefully in our beds. In short we like the Ancient Greeks, want superhuman divine leaders, albeit in human form. New York mayor Giuliani was an example of that kind leaders in September, 2001.

Charismatic Leaders: Leaders whose charm frequently outweighs their competence, are apt to come forward when adversity stroke (Max Weber). Uncertainty and anxiety saturate crises, prodding us to look for charismatic leaders, leaders who exude confidence, inspire belief in their seemingly divine capabilities.

New solution, new leaders: Germans after the world war I defeated and humiliated the terms of Versailles treaty. Great times evoke great leaders. Crises prompts some leaders to renew themselves. (That is how Hitler emerged)

Crises can create circumstances that prompt some leaders "even" in democratic societies, to move beyond merely strong leadership to unwarranted authoritarianism constraining on traditional civil liberties and violate democratic norms.

First leaders attack on a low-value group and then they rarely stop there, they target whomever they choose, whenever and wherever it suits their purpose. The crisis stimulated willingness even hero succumb us to the illusion the toxic leaders "know better than we do", "they can keep us safe".

Man is perishable. That may be, but let us perish resisting, and, if nothing is what awaits us, let us act in such a way that it would be a just fate.

-Etienne Pivert de Senancour

Toxic leaders often push us in a negative directions,diminish us,and leave us worse off than when they found us.We may complain about them,but we rarely unseat them,regardless of how toxic they are.It took decades-in fact almost a century ,for members of the Catholic church in Boston to call for the ouster of religious toxic leaders involved in the sexual molestation of hundreds of young parishoners.

Leaders come to power by addressing their followers needs,from their existential angst to various strands of their psychological motives and the cultural expectations that shape their behavior.

“Control Myth”-Followers convince that they can not topple toxic leader once in power.

Rationalizations-Why we put up with bad leaders?

Maslow Abraham distinguished between two gross categories of human motivation deficiency needs and growth needs.Hunger and thirst.(p 128)

The need for self-actualization sat at the top of the pyramid in Maslow's original hierarchy.

Physiological needs(hunger,thirst,bodily comforts, and so on)

-”This job puts a roof over my kids' head and pays the bills”

-”Other jobs are scarce right now”

Safety needs(security from danger)

-”The last person who tried to confront the leader got fired”

-”In fact,the current leader isn't so bad after all.We could get easily get someone much worse”

Cognitive needs(need to know and understand;need to explore and find meaning)

-”Who would replace him/her”

-”The situation is so complex”

Aesthetic needs(need for symmetry,beauty,and order)

-”Things are out of control.We need the leader to put things in order”

Need for self-actualization(need for self-fulfillment)

I have so much on my own plate.I do not have time to try to unseat the leader or take over the leader's work.



Need for transcendence (need to rise above narrow persona; considerations,need to transcend time,culture,death)

-”I have everything,but something is missing”

Control myths that make us feel both inferior and safe.Controlling ourselves and others are the excuses we give ourselves for not confronting a bad leader.We think that the leader is stronger than we are and has more resources(Safety and self esteem) or he knows more than we do.The control myths speak about the repercussions that may flow from challenging leader.We consider the leader as the gods favir him/her,so we risk the gods' anger if we challenge the leader.”It is morally wrong to challenge leader and so on.”Those control myths that worry about the followers benefits and protect the general status quo.They also enable us to avoid our own responsibilities as leaders.It promises us immortality and ennoblement.

Pushing Nontoxic leaders over the line

Varieties of followers besiege leaders.Benign followers,leader's entourage and malevolent followers.

Benign followers :They want leaders reassure them through grand illusions that they will find safety better yet, heroism,fame,immortality-by participating in the leader's “noble vision”(anxious benign)

Pragmatic Benign followers-driven by personal economic,professional,political-well being.Greed and avarice.

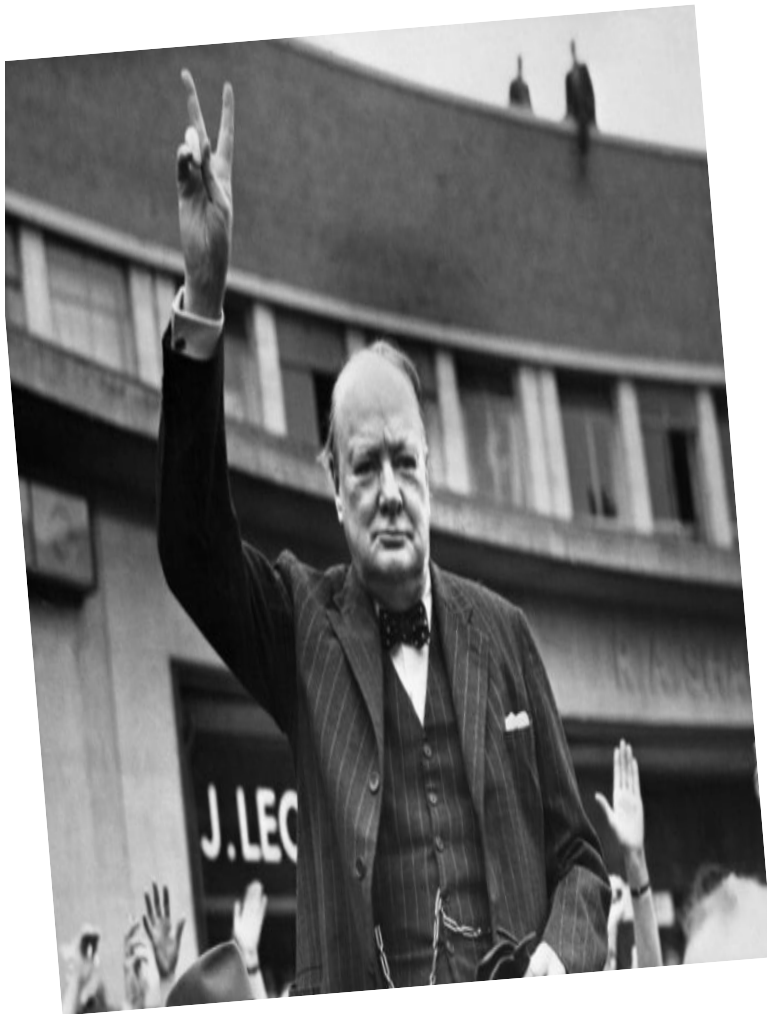
Entourage has a special role that most of the followers do not.Leaders try to keep balance.Outer circle of entourage personal needs of leader and they are retainers.

Malevolent followers are driven by greed and leader's position.

The No-touch Tango:The special dance of the media and leaders.As guardian of the public trust, we expect the media to retain and protect their roles as objective observers and critics.They find themselves no-touch tango mutual need.To stay in business the media need to produce an audience for their advertisers.Whoever is first to assemble the largest audience keeps the greatest share.

The medias lionization often spins those leader's heads.When leaders no longer receive tough-minded feedback from the media and hard-nosed critique from their boards,even the very best of non-toxic leaders can lose their way.

Speaking out on your own behalf for the sake of others. Fred Korematsu American of Japanese origin. He was arrested and convicted in federal district court of knowingly violating the Exclusion Order. Korematsu appealed the decision to the U.S Circuit Court, which upheld his conviction. Korematsu was interned in Utah in a relocation center along with thousands of other Japanese Americans. He appealed to U.S Supreme Court but he was refused. Decades later, at the urging of American Civil Liberties Union and several young lawyers imbued with zeal of a noble mission, Fred agreed to open his case. In 1998 president Bill Clinton hung the Medal of Freedom on his neck. Although he acted initially for personal reasons but others who had been similarly harmed also benefited from his courage.



WHAT MAKES PEOPLE TO PROTEST AND SPEAK OUT?

Proximity: When followers are close to the grievous act, they are more likely to speak out. That is a driving force. If we work in the same department, live in the same neighborhood, or see the event take place, we are more likely to act.

Information: When we only know the bare outlines of the problem, we are probably unlikely to take on what we perceive as somebody else's issue. While I would certainly agree that the Internet and TV can help convey information quickly and far, they are not panacea. For instance how Chinese government quelled the student revolution as the world, stood by and watched.

Cost: is a curious factor. Some confronter's, whistle-blowers, and toxic handler's see that the risks are great but feel that the real cost of not acting is greater.

Identification with the victim: If we identify with the party being hurt, we are more likely to act. Sharing a similar story, even though we share little else, may be enough to create the bond of identification that drives us to act.

Qualities of character: courage and the willingness to take risks, integrity, sense of responsibility and service, compassion.

The emergence of someone who protests and/or a critical event: The appearance of someone who protests the decision of a toxic leader can galvanize resistance that is simmering just below the surface of a group (Rosa Parks's refusal to sit in the back the bus ignited the civil rights movement)

Counsel the toxic leader, help that leader to improve.

Quietly work to undermine the leader.

Join with others to confront the leader

Join with others to overthrow the leader

The policy choices we have: the safeguards against toxic leadership

Term limits: the processes by which we select and keep leaders in public and private office often attract the wrong candidates for the wrong reasons. Repair the flawed process for selecting leaders and create respectable departure options. Many leaders can not give up their comfortable perks because they cling to their role. They also block emergence of young generations of leaders waiting in the wings.

Protecting whistle-blowers from reprisals.

Open and democratic policies, practices, and procedures.

Educated constituents who can deal with their anxieties.

Accountability forum: Leaders, even nontoxic leaders can make serious mistakes. The issue is not simply the substance of the decision, right or wrong, but the process.

Detecting the early signs of toxicity in noble visions and leaders

When the toxicity of leader is full-blown, we easily recognize it. In many cases we can avoid these obvious characters. It is important to escape from them in early stage of toxicity. When we take heroism to extreme it pumps adrenaline and becomes dangerous. We have to detect toxic seeds within the vision. Does the leader begin to display arrogance and excessive pride? Does the leader become self-important and disdainful of others? Does the leader dramatically change his or her lifestyle and circle of friends, becoming inaccessible to old friends? Does he begin to keep his or her own counsel or take counsel only from a few advisors or only from yes-men and flatterers? Does the leader begin to mistreat the lowest or weakest members within the group? Does the leader begin to blame others for his or her decisions and deeds? Does the leader become evasive, refusing to explain his or her decisions or even lying outright? Does the leader begin to act in his or her self-interest instead of the interest of the whole organization or large group, thereby destroying the possibility of authenticity? Does the leader begin to disguise dubious actions or decisions as noble and altruistic?

So it is not hard to understand why we commonly prefer toxic leaders. We respond to them because they offer us free lunches, while nontoxic leaders expect us to help prepare the meal and clean up besides. There are couple of strategies to free ourselves from Toxic Leader's illusions and becoming self-reliant constituents

First of all we have to matriculate in the school of anxiety. We are supposed to learn to take risks, to call upon our own leadership potential "the leader within", and possibly to create our own noble visions. This is the curriculum of leadership. We have to seek the leader within and strengthening democratic organizations. Whatever the other weakness of democracy may be, when it comes to the problem of toxic leaders, democracy has one inconvertible plus: It provides a clear, legal mechanism for removing bad leaders.

Thomas Jefferson
describes: **Whenever a man has cast a longing eye on offices, a rotteness begins in his conduct"**



I found the book very useful and well-written in terms of addressing toxic leaders and finding solutions how to get rid of them. It gave us a description of toxicity and leaders how abused their power to handle the issues. Cultural and educational level of toxic leadership and how followers succumb to the toxic leaders by taking their promises into consideration by not paying attention to important aspects of final destination. The paradox of ambivalence ticks at the core of this book. It raises questions how to understand paradox of toxic and nontoxic leaders? It gives us pragmatic strategies for liberating ourselves from the traps that toxic leaders lay for us and that we set for ourselves. It tells us the importance of setting limits on the tenure of leaders to prevent their turning toxic .It also suggests ways to repair the process whereby we select leaders, so that we can identify effective and decent albeit reluctant candidates who will assume the burdens of leadership for the sake of group, not their own power. Once we fall under a toxic leader's spell, escape is likely to be painful, sometimes nigh possible. In this instance, too, prevention is worth a thousand cures. Thus recognizing early signs of toxicity in leaders can be preventive medicine. The problems toxic leaders pose for their followers are escalating. To address them, we must take a long, hard, but useful look at ourselves, at the world in which we live, at the leaders who seduce us.