

Executive Book Summary  
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# THE EXTRAORDINARY LEADER

## TURNING GOOD MANAGERS INTO GREAT LEADERS

### BOOK OVERVIEW

John Zenger and Joseph Folkman have written this book to help people in leadership positions develop skills and competencies to become even better equipped for their tasks. At the fore of the book, Zenger and Folkman set out to describe leadership using the **Tent Model**. The authors then discuss motivation for improving leadership skills before exploring sixteen major competencies for leadership. Flaws in leadership are also discussed, and tips are given for improving and developing your own leadership skills.

### MATTRESS MODEL

Zenger and Folkman describe that in the past, some models have described leadership as a **spring mattress**, where each coil represents a difference competency. Each of these competencies are considered equally, and the model suggests that there is a great deal of independence; the coils do not ever function together.

Since the coils function independently from one another, when the bowling ball is placed on one section of the bed (those competencies being reduced) does not affect the performances of the entire bed.



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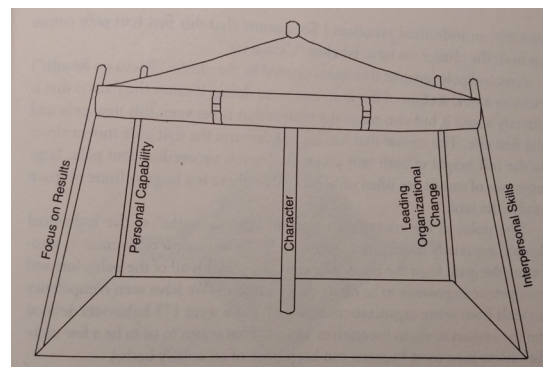
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## TENT MODEL

A much more appropriate model for leadership is a **canvas tent**. The tent is supported by five poles – each of which represents a different competency category or cluster. The pole at the centre is what keeps the tent up. This pole represents **Character**. The other poles should be lifted to raise the tent off the ground. If one pole is extended too much further than the others, the canvas will be stretched. Some sort of equilibrium has to be achieved for the tent to be stable and expanded to its' fullest.

These other poles represent **Personal Capability, Focus on Results, Interpersonal Skills and Leading Organizational Change**



(p. 53)

*“Strength in a cluster becomes a ‘tent pole’ that lifts up the leadership of that person to a higher level.” (p. 53)*

### AN EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT: FOUR STAGES MODEL

Gene Dalton and Paul Thompsen developed a model that “describes four stages of career growth through which people may move” (p. 59).

Stage 1: depending on others

Stage 2: contributing independently

Stage 3: contributing through others

Stage 4: leading through vision

**What stage are you currently in?**

**What competencies might require some attention to move to a higher stage?**

#### 1 Character

Character has often become synonymous with the word ‘leadership’, as it is integral to so many other competencies. It is at the centre of the tent because of its’ link to all the other poles. Some descriptors of good character include:

- making decisions without allowing the influence of one’s personal agenda
- practicing self developments and constantly learning
- keeping commitments and being receptive to feedback
- trusting others, being approachable and treating others equally
- adjusting to changing environments but still showing tenacity.

#### 2 Personal Capability

Personal capability is not typically described as a leadership skill, but should be possessed in order to be perceived as a strong leader. Personal capability includes the following competencies:

- technical knowledge and product knowledge
- professional skills and information technology
- problem solving skills, innovation and initiative.

*It is also beneficial to consider which of Dalton & Thompsen’s Four Stages you exist in (see left).*

#### 3 Focus on Results

The competency area of focusing on results ties very closely to Interpersonal Skills. These two clusters may have the most correlation between them.

The best leaders are able to:

- bring ideas into action and push to take the next step forward
- bring energy, enthusiasm and urgency to their work
- look for ways to improve

#### 4 Interpersonal Skills

The interpersonal skill cluster includes more competencies than any other cluster. It also has the most competencies that correlate with skills in other areas.

These include:

- strong communication
- inspiring others to high standards
- building positive relationships
- working collaboratively
- developing skills of subordinates
- respond positively to feedback
- influencing “higher-ups”
- teaching in a helpful manner
- building self esteem

#### 5 Leading Organizational Change

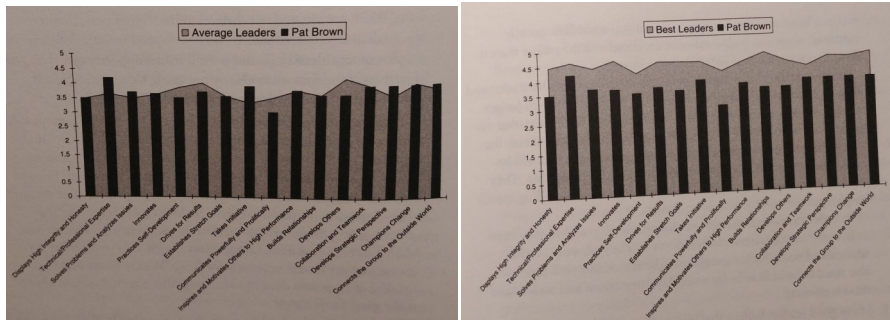
People who champion projects for change in the organization are people who we want to have in leadership roles. These people are able to:

- consider long-range goals for the organization
- balance short term and long term goals
- “translate the organization’s vision and objectives into...goals for others” (p. 68).

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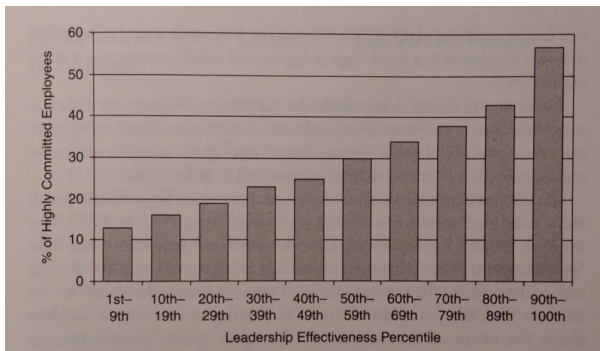
## GREAT LEADERS = GREAT DIFFERENCE

There is no doubt that leaders with poor leadership skills generate poor results. Empirical data shows that those with great leadership skills can generate extraordinary results. “The current problem is that too many good leaders feel that being ‘good’ is good enough” (p.38). Typically, these good leaders are satisfied that they are not poor, so they do not feel pressure to improve and grow. The 360-degree feedback is a catalysing factor in this notion, because individuals are usually compared against an average. If individuals were instead compared to an exceptional leader, they may feel challenged to improve their practice.



Notice in the figure on the left, that Pat Brown is being compared to Average Leaders. He is more likely to seek to improve some of his competencies if he reviews the figure on the right, where he is compared to the Best Leaders. While his own statistics do not change, the data that he is comparing himself to could give him different perspective and motivation.

There is a notable difference in the number of highly committed employees that work with an exceptional leader over a good leader. Nearly 60% of employees answered that they were willing to go above and beyond their ordinary job when giving 360-degree feedback for a leader considered to be exceptional. Only 43% of employees said the same where a leader was only considered good.



The image on the left shows the percentage of highly committed employees correlated with leadership effectiveness. Keep in mind that Good Leadership mostly falls within the 70th-90th percentile, and Exceptional Leadership falls in the top 10%.

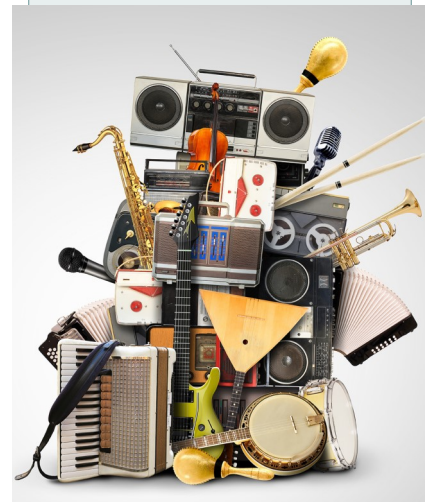
(p. 37)

## UNIQUE ORGANIZATIONS REQUIRE UNIQUE LEADERSHIP

Often, leaders perform very well in one context, but then they do not perform as well after being transferred or changing industries. Why does this happen? If a leader flourishes in one organization, why would they struggle to produce the same results in another? “Great leaders could be unique, widely different, one-of-a-kind versions” (p. 109). There are no absolutely essential competencies across every organization that a leader needs to possess. Similarly, if done poorly, there is nothing that will lead to failure across every organization. Unique abilities from leaders need to be matched to unique requirements within organizations.

**“Leaders are only willing to be as effective as those who in turn lead them” (p.44)**

How do our principals & superintendents model the best leadership practices in our schools?



### Find Your Instrument!

Each instrument has a texture, colour or tone that it produces really well. At some point in a musical score, that contribution will be required.

Finding your instrument will help you to find your place – the place where you can make the most significant contribution.

“Career Best” refers to the spot where someone’s competencies and passions would best align with the needs of an organization.

(p. 40/41)

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## EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT: HOW CAN WE APPLY THE COP MODEL?

Teachers and administrators are not always placed into buildings that are a the best fit for them. Different communities have different values, goals and agendas to help students to learn in that community. While one teacher may be keen on encouraging students to take risks through Arts Education, another may not. On the other hand, one teacher may be comfortable planning lots of outdoor learning opportunities for their students, while another prefers to plan STEM activities inside.

**Can administrators start to employ the COP Model to their school and their staff members to ensure that staffing is as effective and responsive as possible?**

## EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT:

As you read the list of competencies, consider the following:

**What would a high performer look like demonstrating this competency?**

**What would a low performer look like demonstrating this competency?**

**How well are you currently demonstrating this competency?**

*“Certain characteristics or attributes are consistently linked together” (p. 93).*

*“Perceptions are coloured by small pieces of information, which may or may not be correct” (p. 93)*

Be aware of the “halo effect”, where we let someone’s (including our own!) positive attributes overshadow some of the negative ones.

## THE COP MODEL

In order to find a leader and a position that are compatible with one another, the COP Model can be very useful. “A leadership sweet spot occurs when there is an intersection of competencies, passions and organizational [needs and] values” (p. 112).

### Competencies:

When people talk about your strengths, what do they mention first?

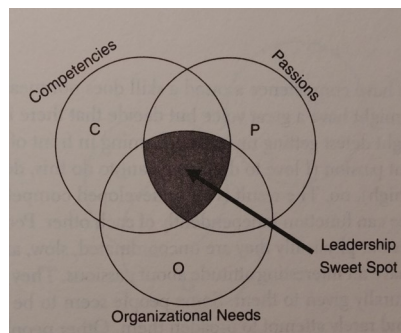
### Passions:

What events bring me lots of satisfaction? What energizes me?

### Organizational Values:

Do your competencies and passions align with the values of the organization?

Barriers exist whenever one of the three sections of the Venn Diagram is detached. For example, a leader might have the competence to provide the organization with what it needs, but they are not feeling passionate about the work that they are doing. Hence, they may feel bored or stuck, and their performance will decrease.



(p. 113)

## DEFINING COMPETENCIES

In the past, Human Resources Departments have frequently attempted to identify competencies needed for effective leadership within a specific organization. Then, leaders can be chosen who possess those competencies. Though about 80% of all companies have made these competency lists, the technique has not been very successful. The lack of success is generally due to three reasons: the list process is too complex, the process is not executed properly, or some faulty assumptions are made.

Two mistakes that are worth highlighting are as follows:

1) Many competency lists are just lists of positive attributes that actually have nothing to do with leadership.

When defining leadership competencies, it is important to ensure that the competencies align with a leadership role.

2) Companies have spent time creating lists based on the needs of the past, rather than what competencies will be required in the future.

Since a great leader will hopefully bring new growth to the organization, it is imperative that a vision is established. That vision will suggest what specific competencies may be required moving forward.

Instead of creating a list specific to each company, Zenger and Folkman have created a framework of 16 competencies that fit into the 5 clusters described in the **Tent Model**. They suggest that while some companies will view certain clusters or specific competencies with greater importance, these 16 traits should be considered desirable for all leaders.

### Character

- 1) Displaying high integrity and honesty

### Personal Capability

- 2) Technical and professional expertise
- 3) Solving problems and analyzing issues
- 4) Innovation
- 5) Practicing self development

### Focus on Results

- 6) Focus on results
- 7) Establish stretch goals
- 8) Take responsibility for outcomes/initiative

### Interpersonal Skills

- 9) Communicating powerfully and prolifically
- 10) Inspiring and motivating others to high performance
- 11) Building relationships
- 12) Developing others
- 13) Collaboration and teamwork

### Leading Organizational Change

- 14) Developing strategic perspectives
- 15) Championing change
- 16) Connect internal groups with the outside world

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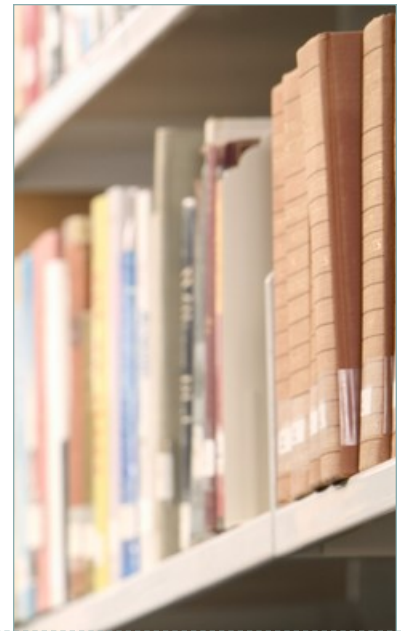
## FIXING FATAL FLAWS

Yes, it is good to celebrate the competencies that we possess. However, it is not good to omit weaknesses as we plan our own self improvement. In order to determine flaws, it is a good idea to assess your competencies. Consider a 360-degree inventory of your leadership traits, and collate the results. Using 360-degree feedback gives you multiple sources, making it easier to accept ratings that were unexpected.

**Look at the Low Scores:** anything that scores below the 10th percentile is considered a flaw.

If you do not have a flaw, that is okay (only 2% leaders possess both strengths and flaws). If you do not have a flaw, look for which weakness is most significant.

**Consider which competencies need improvement:** If you have flaws, address them immediately by getting additional feedback, coaching, and develop a plan for a follow up in a number of months.



*The bearded lady at the circus said, “Everybody’s got something wrong with them. With me, you can tell what it is.”*

—Richard Needham

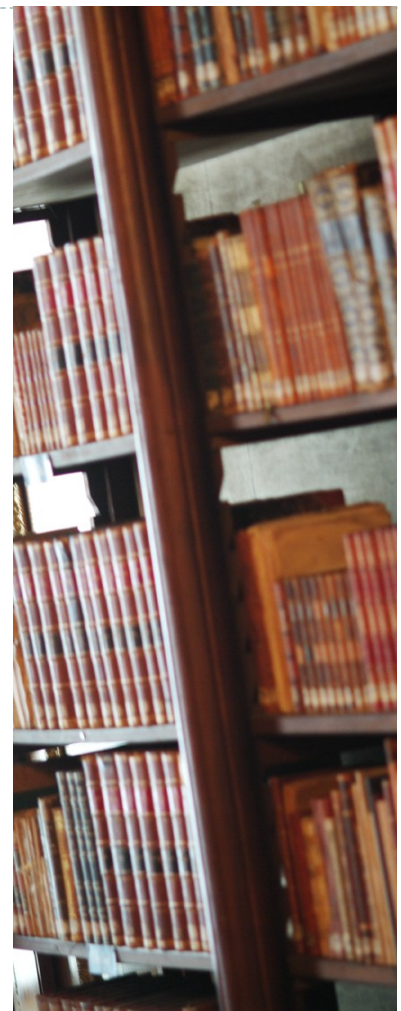
## COMMON FLAWS

- 1) **Not inspiring due to a lack of energy and enthusiasm**
- 2) **Accepting mediocre performance in place of excellent results**
- 3) **Lack of clear vision and direction**
- 4) **Loss of trust stemming from perceived bad judgement and poor decisions**
- 5) **Not a collaborative, team player**
- 6) **Not a good role model**
- 7) **No self-development and learning from mistakes**
- 8) **Lacking interpersonal skills**
- 9) **Resistant to new ideas, thus did not lead change or innovate**
- 10) **Focus is on self, not the development of others.**

Many of these flaws have things in common with one another. Most of them link to emotional intelligence and are not intellectual.

Most of these flaws are observable inabilities—things that will become very obvious to subordinates very quickly.

“In most cases, the leader with a fatal flaw is totally unaware of it. For example, the leader who immediately rejects others’ ideas would in great likelihood describe herself as being full of confidence and having such extensive experience that she knows what ideas will succeed and which will fail. Such individuals are usually unaware of the perception that they reject everyone else’s ideas. (p. 161).



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## REVIEW:

Zenger and Folkman's book is quite scientific, with lots of empirical data gathered and presented. Each chapter includes information and statistics from surveys that were completed on the topic. There is a database of over 200,000 surveys that led to the data in this book—360-degree feedback was used to gather information about strong leadership in some very prominent organizations. The authors claim that their objective is to provide a simple model of what leadership is and give a practical guide for helping leaders to achieve their goals for development. There is a plenty of good information and thoughtful perspective offered in this book, though there is a lot of commentary that is perhaps unnecessary. That said, I enjoy the accessible language used in the book, and have already recommended it to leader's in other industries.

## DEVELOPING YOUR LEADERSHIP ABILITIES

"The most dangerous leadership myth is that leaders are born—that there is a genetic factor to leadership. Myth asserts that people simply either have certain charismatic qualities or not. That's nonsense; in fact, the opposite is true. Leaders are made rather than born."

—Warren G Bennis

There is some argument about whether people are born as leaders or not. For example, it is scientifically proven that personality traits do not change very much during our lifetime, so the personality dimensions of leadership are mostly developed at a very young age. That said, nearly all people are made better leaders from specific developmental activities. **DO NOT RELY ON YOUR ORGANIZATION TO MAKE YOU A BETTER LEADER. Take control!**

The authors have listed 25 things that individuals can do to improve themselves. Many are expected, so I am only including some highlights here:

### 4) Find a coach:

Many prodigies have coaches. Musicians and athletes have coaches and so can you. Find someone who will be a good mentor.

### 6) Identify your weaknesses, and find ways to make them irrelevant:

Reallocate work or employ outside resources so that your weaknesses are not important—just be honest about them.

### 11) Learn to absorb feedback in an emotionally healthy way:

Remember, sometimes flaws are not noticed by the person who possesses them. Ask for feedback so that you can be aware of problems.

### 15) Communicate with stories:

Stories reduce complexity and they are memorable. They connect with the hearer on a deeper level. Illustrate key ideas with stories.

### 16) Infuse energy into every situation:

You can ignite other people's passions by bringing excitement, energy and enthusiasm to everything you do.

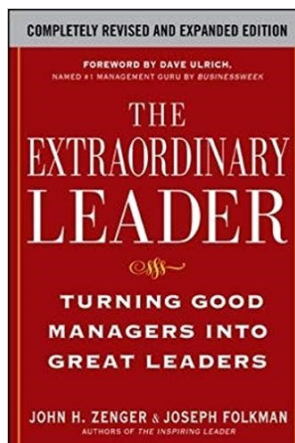
### 19) Monitor your own leadership effectiveness:

Have a dashboard where you can self assess when needed. In a school, this could include A3 data, TTFM data, feedback documentation from staff and students, etc.

**22) Study high performers:** Find out what people are doing that make them so effective. See what you can add into your own routine.

### 25) Think ahead for the skills you might need in the future:

Use the COP model to determine what the Organization's needs are—see if you can align them to your own passions and competencies.



Zenger, J.H. and Folkman, J.R. (2009). *The Extraordinary Leader*. New York: McGraw Hill.