

PRINCIPLE-CENTERED LEADERSHIP

By Stephen R. Covey

An Executive
Book Summary
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Walker

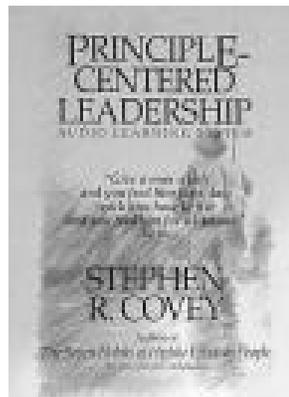
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"Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach him how to fish and you feed him for a life."



A Brief Summary:

In his book *Principle-Centered Leadership*, Stephen Covey encourages us to utilize four central principles (security, guidance, wisdom, power) as the core in our personal and professional lives. Covey believes that centering our lives on these principles is "the key to developing [the] rich internal power in our lives" (p. 20). The book is divided into two sections: Section 1 addresses personal and interpersonal effectiveness, while Section 2 examines managerial and organizational development. Covey offers guidelines and tips on how to achieve a more principle-centered perspective, including charts, lists, concept maps, and many memorable quotes scattered throughout the text. Readers will appreciate the down-to-earth, anecdotal style in which the book is written.



Covey, Stephen R. (1991). *Principle-centered leadership*. New York: Summit Books.

"The greatest way to live with honor in this world is to be what we pretend to be" - Socrates

In *Principle-Centered Leadership*, you may find answers to some of the problematic questions that arise at home and at work:

- *How do we achieve and maintain a wise and renewing balance between work and family?*
- *How can we be empowered (and empower other people) with confidence and competence to solve problems and seize opportunities?*
- *How do we unleash the creativity, resourcefulness, talent, and energy of the vast majority of the present work force?*
- *How do we turn a mission statement into a constitution?*

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The Four Principles

There are no “quick fixes” or short-term approaches to solving problems. As “The Law of the Harvest” teaches us, you cannot forget to plant and goof off during the spring and summer, and still expect to reap a bountiful harvest in the fall. It just doesn’t work. We need to understand that there are natural laws or governing principles that underlie our behaviour and our very existence as human beings. Hence, the **four principles**:

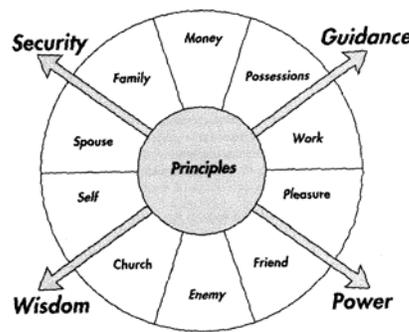


The author, Stephen R. Covey.

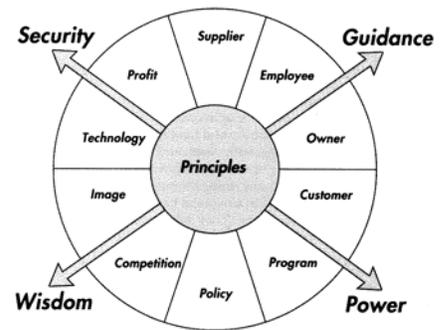
<p>Security (our sense of worth, identity, emotions, self-esteem, and personal strength)</p>	<p>Guidance (the direction we receive in life)</p>
<p>Wisdom (a sense of balance, judgement, discernment, comprehension)</p>	<p>Power (the capacity to act, the strength and courage to accomplish something)</p>

“Principles provide ‘true north’ direction to our lives when navigating the ‘streams’ of our environments” (p. 19).

These principles are like compasses; they point us in the right way and show us the direction we need in our everyday lives. Principles are constant; they apply at all times and in all places. “Principle-centered leadership is based on the reality that we cannot violate these natural laws” (p. 19). By placing these four principles at the center of our lives, at our core, we can be sure it unifies and integrates the other aspects of our lives (see figures below):



Personal Life



Professional Life



“The key to growth is to learn to make promises and to keep them” (p. 55).

Three Resolutions

1. Exercise self-discipline and self-denial.
2. Work on character and competence.
3. Dedicate your talents and resources to noble purposes and to provide service to others.

Principle-Centered Leadership

Covey emphasizes that principle-centered leadership is practiced from the inside-out. Personal and organizational transformation must come from within. We cannot control what others do, but we can certainly control our own decisions and behaviours. In order to achieve personal and organizational effectiveness, one must also be committed and able to think with a long-term perspective. Covey encourages principle-centered leaders to build greater, more trusting and communicative relationships with others in the workplace and in the home.

So what does a principle-centered leader look like? In Chapter 1, Covey identifies eight defining characteristics of people who are principle-centered leaders:



Eight Characteristics of Principle-Centered Leaders

1. They are continually learning.
2. They are service-oriented.
3. They radiate positive energy.
4. They believe in other people.
5. They lead balanced lives.
6. They see life as an adventure.
7. They are synergistic.
8. They exercise for self-renewal.

“Trust—or the lack of it—is at the root of success or failure in relationships and in the bottom-line results of business, industry, education, and government” (p. 31).

Four levels in which to practice the Four Principles

As stated above, principle-centered leadership is practiced from the inside out *and* on four levels. We need to utilize the four principles (security, guidance, wisdom, power) along these four levels (personal, interpersonal, managerial, and organizational).



Organizational—my need to organize people

Managerial—my responsibility to get a job done with others

Interpersonal—my relationships and interactions with others

Personal—my relationship with myself



“If you want the secondary greatness of public recognition, focus first on primary greatness of character” (p. 63).

Marriage, Family, and Children



As we can all relate and perhaps even attest to, our professional lives are often influenced by our personal lives. Disharmony and disorder in the home and family domain can have an adverse effect on professional successes. We need to ensure that marriage and family relationships are healthy for they play a large role in our daily work lives. Throughout Covey's book, the ideals of principle-centered leadership are central to how we should conduct and carry ourselves in the home and with our families. Covey believes so strongly in the values of marriage, family, and children that he devotes two chapters to the development of marital and familial relationships. The key points from each of these chapters are highlighted below:

Eight ways to enrich marriage and family relationships

Three character traits are essential to primary greatness:

- Integrity
- Maturity
- Abundance Mentality (there is plenty out there for everybody)

1. Retain a long-term perspective.
2. Rescript your marriage and family life.
3. Reconsider your roles.
4. Reset your goals.
5. Realign family systems.
6. Refine three vital skills (time management, communication, and problem-solving).
7. Regain internal security.
8. Develop a family mission statement.



Making Champions of Your Children

1. Build your children's self-esteem.
2. Encourage primary greatness.
3. Encourage your children to develop their own interests.
4. Try to create an enjoyable family culture.
5. Plan ahead for family events.
6. Try to set an example of excellence.
7. Teach them to visualize so that they can recognize their own potential.
8. Adopt their friends.
9. Teach your children to have faith, to believe and trust others, and to affirm, build, bless, and serve others.



Seven Chronic Problems

Acute and chronic are words that are often used in the medical field. Acute pain is pain that flares up quickly. It causes us immediate distress and discomfort. On the other hand, chronic pain is more long-term and constant. It is unrelenting and lingering. Moreover, chronic pain may be difficult to diagnose and/or cure.

In organizations, there can be *chronic problems*, problems that are long-lasting, persistent, and painful. Chronic organizational problems require much more than “quick-fix” solutions. Solving chronic problems often require time, direction, and commitment from all individuals in the organization. In *Principle-Centered Leadership*, Covey identified seven chronic problems that can be found universally in organizations:

The organization has:
1. No shared vision or values.
2. No strategic path.
3. Poor alignment.
4. Wrong style.
5. Poor skills.
6. Low trust.
7. No self-integrity.



Individuals within the organization may be part of the chronic problems; however, these same individuals can also be part of the solutions.

“I’m confident that enlightened leaders can cure these seven chronic problems, ...but to do that they’ve got to change hearts, build trust, revise the structure and

Shifting the Management Paradigm

So the question is “How do we become more effective?” Covey reveals that in order to make “quantum improvements,” it is necessary to change your way of thinking, to change your *paradigm*.

“The great breakthroughs are breaks with old ways of thinking” (p. 173).

In your own life, you may have experienced paradigm shifts. Think of the time you taught a different grade or subject area. Or when you got married, and shifted from the single life to life with a spouse. During these times, your way of thinking likely changed. How you viewed the world, how you viewed your responsibilities, or how you viewed your role in life probably changed as well.

Throughout the book, Covey has encouraged his readers to change the paradigm with which they view leadership. He acknowledges that there are different leadership paradigms out there (i.e., scientific authoritarian, benevolent authoritarian, human resource), but he believes **principle-centered leadership** is the leadership paradigm that is most holistic. Principle-centered leadership “embraces the principles of fairness and kindness and makes better use of the talents of people for increased efficiency, but also leads to quantum leaps in personal and organizational effectiveness” (p. 180).



“enlightenment”

Total Quality and Principle-Centered Leadership



Principle-centered leadership provides the foundation for Total Quality

Total quality is the continuous improvement in the four levels described earlier in the summary: personal and professional development, interpersonal relations, managerial effectiveness, and organizational productivity. Total quality values people. It is rooted in the timeless principles of faith and hope, constancy and consistency, and virtue and truth in human relations.

Total quality can be achieved through Principle-Centered Leadership (PCL). PCL provides the two elements essential to the quality process: leadership and people. PCL empowers people and organizations so that they can achieve their potential and become more effective in whatever they do.

“Principle-Centered Leadership enables organizations to achieve their Total Quality objectives” (p. 263).

About the Author:

Stephen Covey is a world-renowned author and expert in the field of leadership. He is probably best known for his popular book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*.

Covey is also a co-founder and co-chairman of the Covey Leadership Centre, the largest management and leadership centre in the world.

Tying it all together



Principle-Centered Leadership is a significant read for all members of an organization, not just leaders. It focuses on individuals and their roles in family life and the work place. After critically reading and analyzing the numerous points in Covey's book, his central message seems to be **build your character from within**. Focus on building trust and effective communication with others; this in turn, will enable you to guide yourself and others at home and at work with a principle-centered approach.

In our own professional lives as educators, we often deal with many outside influences. Covey suggests shifting the traditional student-teacher relationship to a model in which we create a Principle-Centered Learning Environment. In such an environment, the student is *empowered*. All stakeholders are identified and share *equal* responsibility in providing the best learning environment for the student. At first, this may seem to be a challenging task, but all it requires is a principle-centered paradigm...and after reading this summary, you now know a little more about how to adopt a principle-centered paradigm in your own life.

