

chapter 1

The READY Thinker

“Leaders accomplish things that reach beyond their solitary abilities by acting—and getting others to act—with a maturity that surpasses limited self-interest.”

Personally, I’m not really into reading books on leadership. But I keep wondering why certain people act consistently strong during times of inconsistency, why some remain resilient despite negative odds, and why some emerge victorious while others succumb to pressure. I keep questioning how a leader can bring out these behaviors sometimes but not all the time.

Most of us lead in some way: at work, at home, at school, as a coach, or wherever you hold influence over others. Leaders make a difference, good or bad. The framework of thinking I outline in this book can provide you and your entire team with a method to get motivated and prosper.

I call this new framework of thinking READY Thinking.

READY Thinking is what successful people use, consciously or subconsciously, to effectively take action in the face of both challenge and opportunity. READY Thinking allows an individual to get motivated, to tackle tough problems, to flourish in times of turmoil, to move through change more rapidly, and to win more often.

Perhaps you've noticed that some people are more capable of staying motivated than others. They're better able to deal with the change they confront. These are individuals who grasp opportunity more ably and consistently move through times of stress. They attract energy and followers. They are action oriented, moving forward with confidence and purpose.

Then again, perhaps you've observed others equally affected by circumstance who are left paralyzed and diminished by change. These are the miserable ones, mired in self-defeating thoughts and inaction. Caught leaning back on their heels, these folks seem to miss opportunity when it knocks and grumble about the hand that life has dealt them.

I developed READY Thinking in the real-world laboratory of some of America's largest corporations. I have firsthand experience in leading thousands of employees and challenging them to avail themselves of change and seize opportunity. Frankly, some could, and some couldn't. I have been intrigued by those who could, individuals who seem to win consistently in life. They tend to have a unique approach to living, a style of intellectual toughness, and an emotional suppleness that enables them to achieve their goals and ambitions, often in the face of disturbing times.

Great leaders throughout history, as well as the great spiritual and intellectual thinkers throughout time, all speak of a type of thinking that infuses the soul with peace, courage, purpose, and bearing. Privilege and adversity strike indiscriminately, but those who face them using certain core beliefs and thought patterns motivate themselves to win and succeed.

This book is intended to introduce you to the concepts of READY Thinking and teach you how to apply them to heighten your personal mastery, increase your own performance, and intensify the impact you have when leading and influencing others.

So let's get started with the basics. What is a leader?

I have no idea. Don't look to this book to tell you. I am as mystified as the next person by what a leader is.

Frankly, "leadership" strikes me as a rather ticklish thing, a hit-or-miss proposition. Even great leaders have blotchy leadership complexions. Abraham Lincoln, by most accounts, didn't have much success in life, and then he became arguably our country's finest president. As mayor of New York City, Rudy Giuliani was seriously grating on the nerves of his constituents on September 10, but 9/11 became a day that defined his character as a leader. One might argue that St. Peter, a disciple of Jesus Christ's who went on to build the Christian church, scored a tad low on the leadership curve during the early-morning hours of that first Easter weekend, when he denied three times even knowing Jesus. Winston Churchill acted like a deadbeat brother-in-law—a hard-drinking, cigar-smoking, get-up-at-noon kind of guy who bums money and raids your refrigerator—before becoming a hard-drinking, cigar-smoking, get-up-at-noon kind of guy who took down Hitler and the Nazis and was instrumental in saving the free world.

Apparently, no one has a perfect record. There is no serum to inject. Rather, leadership is a method of thinking that, once adopted, leads to certain productive action.

So, while I don't know what a leader is, I know what good leaders do: **Leaders accomplish things that reach beyond their solitary abilities by acting—and getting others to act—with a maturity that surpasses limited self-interest.**

I sweated over that line. I wanted it to be of impact. I even put it in bold for you. I want to grab you right here in Chapter One. Get a marker and highlight it. I think it is very good.

And that's not all! I give you license to use that line, anytime and anywhere you'd like. Quote it in your next meeting. Use it in an upcoming presentation. Work it into a conversation. Integrate it into your résumé. Go ahead—knock yourself out.

But, do so with one very important thing in mind. Like every other leadership bromide, others will use this one too: good people, bad people, good leaders, bad leaders. You can teach that line to a parrot, but it won't make it a leader.

This is why it is helpful to think of leadership not as a thing but as a course of action, not as something you talk about but as something you do. READY Thinking is about adopting a posture that precipitates action. It is practicing a method of thinking to set you up to be influential during change, to move through obstacles, and to size up and grasp opportunity.

Eerily, the worst leaders often talk the best game. Like some kind of paranormal phenomenon, those least inclined to take action are often the ones who say the perfect thing—especially in a group setting.

The. Absolute. Perfect. Thing.

Uncanny!

This isn't leadership. Don't be fooled. This is no more than a horn player who plays notes but can't create music.

I am reminded of the epitaph written by the Earl of Rochester over the death of Charles II:

*Here lies our mutton-eating king,
Whose word no man relies on,
Who never said a foolish thing,
Nor ever did a wise one.*

Some people talk a good game, but **in the crucible moments when true leadership is demanded, theirs finds no purchase.**

I like that line too, so I put it in bold.

READY Thinking is a framework of thinking that produces influential action, a method of bringing revolutionary thinking into places where leadership is required. It uses the simple acronym READY to encompass the following five principles:

- R is for Reality:** Defining the situation in uncompromisingly clear and concise terms for yourself and the people around you. It is the most essential step in READY Thinking—and the hardest. This book will explore the great secret of reality and four key barriers that stop us from defining it.
- E is for Enlarging:** Giving yourself and those you lead an aspirational, energy-inducing vision much larger than the task at hand and much bolder than the situation warrants.
- A is for Accountability:** Authentically taking responsibility for your actions and the leadership you give to others. Most important, you'll learn when not to be accountable. That's right: in READY Thinking, you'll learn about the value of not being accountable!
- D is for Durability:** Persisting through tough times, finishing the job, and valuing the benefit of sweat and toil. Learning about the privilege of suffering a setback.
- Y is for a YES! Outlook:** Having a YES! Outlook on life means looking at change as a chance for growth. It is the practice of asking "What can I do with this change?" as a first reaction, rather than "What will this change do to me?" Having a YES! Outlook means taking what you do seriously but not taking who you are seriously. Life's pretty short! Why not laugh and enjoy it?

These five principles can have tremendous impact on both your life and the lives of those you lead.

Are you READY?