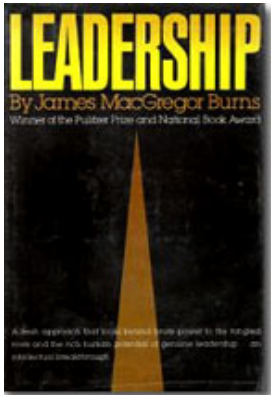


Book Review



LEADERSHIP

By James MacGregor Burns
Harper & Row, 1978,
530 pages

This sweeping study of the political, social, and psychological dimensions of leadership is already a classic, by most accounts. While traditional conceptions of leadership tend to be "dominated by images of presidents and prime ministers speaking to the masses from on high," genuine leadership actually has very little to do with power and domination, writes James MacGregor Burns. True leaders, in his definition, induce followers to act in accord with the values and the motivations of both leaders and followers. It is a dynamic relationship that, at its best, finds leaders engaged in a process of raising the consciousness of followers, or, at a minimum, engages both leaders and followers in a common enterprise. Leadership is meaningless, Burns says, without its connection to common purposes and collective needs.

Burns makes a central distinction between what he calls "transactional" and "transforming" leadership. Transactional leadership takes place when "one person takes the initiative in making contact with others for the purpose of an exchange of valued things." This type of leadership is best described as the politics of exchange, in which, for example, a public official bargains jobs for votes. Transforming leadership, in contrast, has a moral dimension. It may be said to occur when "one or more persons engage with each other in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality." The transforming leader is one who, though initially impelled by the quest for individual recognition, ultimately advances collective purpose by being attuned to the aspirations of his or her followers. Mao and Gandhi are quintessential transformational leaders, according to Burns, for they met their people's initial needs but instead of riding them to power remained sensitive to their higher purposes and aspirations.

Burns also distinguishes between leaders and "power wielders." Leaders in some way satisfy the motives of their followers, whereas power-wielders are intent only on realizing their own purposes, whether or not these are shared by the people over whom they exert their power. By this definition, Hitler, for instance, was not a leader, but rather a power-wielder. Charisma, like power, is often used to explain leadership, Burns notes, but the word has become so overburdened as to "collapse under close analysis." He prefers to speak of transforming leadership in terms of four basic categories: intellectual, reform, revolutionary, and heroic leadership.

Leadership is not confined to the political sphere, according to Burns. The concept is broad enough to include everything from "great leaders" to mothers, teachers, peers, and work supervisors. The key to leadership in each case is the discovery of shared purpose and the interplay between motives and values. In Burns's view, power and leadership are not "things," but rather relationships. For all his attention to political theory and historical analysis, Burns's conception of leadership is at bottom psychological. Drawing upon Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Lawrence Kohlberg's theories of moral stages of development, he maintains that leadership elevates people from lower to higher levels of needs and moral development, and that true leaders come from self-actualizing individuals who are motivated to grow, to be

efficacious, and to achieve, rather than be famous -- in short, to fulfill themselves. Self-actualizers are true leaders because they are sensitive to the needs of others and learn from others. Therefore, "self-actualization means the ability to lead by being led," and self-actualizing leaders can lead followers toward their self-actualization by helping them to become aware of their "true" needs.

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