

EDGAR H. SCHEIN
PETER A. SCHEIN

HUMBLE LEADERSHIP

THE POWER OF
RELATIONSHIPS,
OPENNESS,
AND TRUST



Praise for *Humble Leadership*

“Effective leadership is all about building trust and relationships. With *Humble Leadership*, Ed and Peter help us actually get there by understanding relationships on a much more granular and tangible level.”

—**Severin Schwan, CEO, Roche Group**

“In an era of national cynicism and dismay, this call for empathy, trust, and collaboration is a timely breath of fresh air with relevance for leaders at all levels.”

—**Lucian Leape, Adjunct Professor of Health Policy (retired), Harvard School of Public Health**

“In focusing on ‘levels of relationships,’ the book explains how emerging leaders can succeed by interacting with peers and those reporting to them in ways that are in stark contrast to the coercive and ‘bad behaviors’ we are currently hearing about. Ed and Peter Schein offer an alternative and far superior approach to leadership—one based on cooperative relationships with others that emphasize trust and respect and, in turn, lead to stronger and more effective organizations.”

—**Robert A. Cooke, author of *Human Synergistics’ Organizational Culture Inventory***

“For those in the health-care world who face the challenge of leading organizations with layers of administrative and clinical complexity, this book offers a path to success. Humble leadership, as the authors remind us, though, is no mere philosophy. It is a result of disciplined attention to structure, culture, and relationships. The Scheins offer a persuasive road map to achieve this understanding and true effectiveness in institutional settings.”

—**Paul F. Levy, former CEO, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, and author of *Goal Play!***

“Humility may be the modern leader’s most important attribute. In a complex, dynamic world, humility is simply realism. This powerful and thoroughly engaging book delivers the wisdom of Edgar Schein’s half century of research and practice dedicated to helping organizations and those who manage them. Its authors—a pioneering organizational scholar and his son—embody humility as they describe its power in transforming organizations. Compelling case studies clarify the humble leadership approach and make it actionable.”

—**Amy C. Edmondson, Novartis Professor of Leadership and Management, Harvard Business School**

“Edgar and Peter Schein’s new book, *Humble Leadership*, builds on decades of study focused on organizational culture and leadership. The authors articulate the criticality of leadership in successful organizations and the strong correlation of relationships that go beyond the transactional with successful leaders and successful organizations. This is a must-read for reflective leaders at all levels seeking to enhance their effectiveness and execution in pursuit of their organizational mission and vision.”

—**Gary S. Kaplan, MD, Chairman and CEO, Virginia Mason Health System, and Chairman Lucian Leape Institute**

“Edgar and Peter Schein have built on a series of previous informative books such as *Helping* and *Humble Inquiry* with their new book, *Humble Leadership*. The insights into the importance of relationships and building an atmosphere of openness and trust are helpful to all leaders. I believe it is particularly informative for those in health care, dealing with the marked technical and operational complexities.”

—**Lane F. Donnelly, MD, Chief Quality Officer, Lucile Packard Children’s Hospital Stanford, and Professor, Stanford University School of Medicine**

“*Humble Leadership* introduces a new model for leadership that supports effectiveness in a rapidly changing world where leaders and their followers are being driven by deeply entrenched cultural norms. The timeless insights about relationships, personizing, group process, and culture will help every leader.”

—**Tim Kuppler, Director of Culture and Organization Development, Human Synergistics, and cofounder of CultureUniversity.com**

“The book offers a deeply human approach to leadership that is attuned to the staggering complexity, rapid change, and uncertainty facing anyone aiming to make a difference in today’s world. Written as a joint project by Ed Schein and his son Peter, *Humble Leadership* is a way of being a leader that relies not on transactional power but on the relational power that comes from trust, openness, and collaboration. Illustrated with rich case examples from the Scheins’ extensive practices as organizational consultants and exercises to develop leadership capacities of one’s own, the book has the ring of authenticity that comes from the hearts of people who have walked the walk.”

—**Maureen O’Hara, Founding Fellow, International Futures Forum; Professor, National University; and coauthor, with Graham Leicester, of *Dancing at the Edge***

Humble Leadership

THE HUMBLE LEADERSHIP SERIES

- Humble Leadership
- Humble Consulting
- Humble Inquiry
- Helping

Humble Leadership

The Power of Relationships, Openness, and Trust

EDGAR H. SCHEIN

and

PETER A. SCHEIN



BK

Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
a BK Business book

Humble Leadership

Copyright © 2018 by Edgar H. Schein and Peter A. Schein

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, write to the publisher, addressed "Attention: Permissions Coordinator," at the address below.



Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

1333 Broadway, Suite 1000

Oakland, CA 94612-1921

Tel: (510) 817-2277, Fax: (510) 817-2278

BK

www.bkconnection.com

Ordering information for print editions

Quantity sales. Special discounts are available on quantity purchases by corporations, associations, and others. For details, contact the "Special Sales Department" at the Berrett-Koehler address above.

Individual sales. Berrett-Koehler publications are available through most bookstores. They can also be ordered directly from Berrett-Koehler: Tel: (800) 929-2929; Fax: (802) 864-7626; www.bkconnection.com

Orders for college textbook/course adoption use. Please contact Berrett-Koehler: Tel: (800) 929-2929; Fax: (802) 864-7626.

Distributed to the U.S. trade and internationally by Penguin Random House Publisher Services.

Berrett-Koehler and the BK logo are registered trademarks of Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

First Edition

Paperback print edition ISBN 978-1-5230-9538-4

PDF e-book ISBN 978-1-5230-9539-1

IDPF e-book ISBN 978-1-5230-9540-7

2018-1

Book produced by BookMatters; copyedited by Louise Doucette; proofread by Janet Reed Blake; indexed by Leonard Rosenbaum. Cover design by Susan Malikowski, DesignLeaf Studio

To our grandchildren and their children

This page intentionally left blank

Contents

Preface	<i>ix</i>
1 A New Approach to Leadership	<i>1</i>
2 Culturally Defined Levels of Relationship	<i>22</i>
3 Humble Leadership in Governance: The Singapore Story	<i>40</i>
4 Transforming a Medical Center into a Level 2 Culture	<i>49</i>
5 Humble Leadership in the US Military	<i>60</i>
6 When Hierarchy and Unintended Consequences Stifle Humble Leadership	<i>79</i>
7 Humble Leadership and the Future	<i>100</i>
8 Humble Leadership Requires Reinforcing the “Soft Stuff”	<i>117</i>
9 <i>Personizing</i> : Building Level 2 Relationships	<i>130</i>
References	<i>145</i>
Acknowledgments	<i>151</i>
Index	<i>155</i>
About the Authors	<i>161</i>

This page intentionally left blank

Preface

What This Book Is About

Do you find yourself mired in an individualistic competitive culture of management in which leadership is always about a “superstar” doing something extraordinary and heroic? Would it help to think of leadership *not* as the “seven steps” you must take to lead, but as the energy that is shared in a group that is accomplishing something new and better? This book proposes a relational view of leadership as a process of learning, sharing, and directing new and better things to do in the dynamic interpersonal and group processes that increasingly characterize today’s organizations. Such leadership processes can occur at any level, in any team or workgroup, in any meeting, in tight or open networks, in co-located or widely dispersed work units, and across all kinds of cultural boundaries. Leadership can come from group members as often as from designated or appointed leaders. It will rotate unpredictably as the tasks of the groups change in the volatile markets that are changing at an exponential rate.

In our view, leadership is always a *relationship*, and truly successful leadership thrives in a *group culture of high openness and high trust*. Leadership and culture can be seen as two sides of the same coin, and culture is quintessentially

a group phenomenon. Though this book focuses on a new model of leadership, it is equally a book about culture and group dynamics.

The traditional twentieth-century culture of management can be described as a transactional set of relationships among designated roles that unwittingly creates conditions of low openness and low trust and can, therefore, make truly effective leadership difficult. We will refer to these transactional relationships as “Level 1,” referring to the concept of “levels of relationships” that was first introduced in 2016 in the book *Humble Consulting*. We propose “Humble Leadership” as a model that is intimately tied to a more personal, trusting, and open culture built on more personal intragroup and intergroup relationships. We will refer to this as “Level 2.”

We emphasize that the process of leadership can be conceived of as distinct from traditional vertical hierarchy and individual “heroic” performance. *Leading* in business and in the military, *directing* in the arts, *convening* and *organizing* social and political groups, *coaching* professional sports teams, and *founding* new organizations all have in common that such leadership occurs in groups and hinges on open and trusting relationships within those groups. Only Level 2 relationships within those groups enable all members to be inspired to work at their best.

This book is about reasserting that the core of organizational longevity is in the interaction of social, emotional, and cooperative whole human beings in various kinds of personal relationships to each other. Humble leadership can be anything from convening groups to becoming a catalyst that enables them and then disappears until needed again. This model does not displace other models such as servant, or transformative, or inclusive

leadership but is, in a sense, the process, the dynamic element that has to be present in any of those models for them to succeed—Humble Leadership concerns itself with creating the culture that makes purposeful forward movement sustainable as the world of work evolves.

Who This Book Is For

This book is for all managers and leaders who have the motivation, the scope, and the flexibility to create change in their organizations. Humble Leadership is most needed in our corporations but is equally relevant to the other sectors of society, such as medicine, the arts, our political institutions, not-for-profits, sports teams, local community organizations, and so on. In fact, we often see archetypes of our model of Humble Leadership in such community organizations, in sports, and in the theater and performance arts.

This model is for leaders, but it is not just for those in leading roles. We assume leadership exists in all corners and levels of all organizations. We see leadership as a complex mosaic of relationships, not as a two-dimensional (top-down) status in a hierarchy, nor as a set of unusual gifts or talents of “high-potential” individuals. This view of leadership should be especially relevant to readers who are in human resources and organization development, because we emphasize that Humble Leadership is as much about the “soft skills” as it is about technology, strategy, authority, discipline, and so on.

We conceive of leadership as more than a role, as a collaborative relationship directed at doing something different, new and better, and it should therefore be relevant to product managers, finance and operations leads, CFOs,

board members, investors, doctors, lawyers, and others in the “helping” professions. We hope to find readers at any point in a value chain who can see the impact of designing optimal information-sharing, open, and trusting relationships that improve outcomes by improving the way groups reanimate and reenergize static, role-based organizational designs, and inspire the participants in these groups to give their best *ensemble* performances.

What You Will Gain by Reading This Book

Prescriptive leadership books—and there are many great ones to choose from—offer lists of requisite skills, success formulas, and desirable attributes that will help you climb to the top, to invent the next big thing, to change the world. There is little doubt in our minds that great leadership prescriptions have contributed to the explosive growth in innovation, global expansion, and financial success that characterize the 35 years from the early 1980s to now (early 2018). Our concern is that this focus on heroes and “disrupters” with the right personal values and visions will only go so far in preparing any one of us for the work upheavals we will face in the next 35 years.

What if we proposed that you can reframe the personal challenge of improving your leadership skills into a collective challenge of helping to improve how your groups perform? Consider this book as a way to take the pressure off you to do it all. Instead of heading into work wondering how you alone can solve the problem, what if you went to work committed to sorting it out with a partner, a group, a large or small work team? It's not up to you alone to solve the problem, to lead to greatness, to change the world. It is up to you to create a learning environment in which you and your group can

cooperate in identifying and fixing the processes that solve problems, and maybe then change the world. We hope this book gives you some new ways to ask questions, some new ways to learn, in sum, some examples of Humble Leadership that have helped others create change and growth.

Brief Historical Note

We have always been puzzled by this question: “Do leaders create cultures or do cultures create leaders?” We have seen many examples of both and have continued to honor the dichotomy. However, in the last 75 years we have evolved the field of group dynamics and have invented “experiential learning” in group contexts, which has enabled us to observe and manage how group forces (culture) and individual initiative (leading) are in constant interaction. Leaders are constantly shaping cultures, but cultures always limit what defines leadership and what individual change agents will be allowed to get away with. We reaffirmed this point in our fifth edition of *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (Schein & Schein, 2017).

As socialized humans we cannot step outside our culture, but we can begin to understand our culture and see how leadership as a relational activity is both shaped by and shapes culture. We can also begin to see in which direction managerial culture needs to evolve in order to be relevant to the imminent environmental, social, political, economic, and technological changes. The concept of Humble Leadership derives from this need and highlights the interactive nature of leadership as wanting to do something new and better within the boundaries of what the existing culture will accept and, if those boundaries are too restrictive, to begin to change those cultural dimensions.

As the reader will see, the hardest part of this process will be to change elements of the existing managerial culture, which we believe has become ossified if not obsolete. A new model of cooperative leadership may struggle to find its footing in an individualistic competitive transactional culture. So, the first challenge of the emergent humble leader may well be to begin to change that culture.

Conventional managerial culture has never avoided talking about teams and groups as critical (though perhaps not central). Teams still revolve around individuals, as evidenced by team incentives following individual incentives. We still tend to focus incentives on leaders of teams, and yet important research over the last 75 years strongly indicates how *an effective group or team creates the conditions for leadership as much as leaders create effective teams*.

Similarly, transparency and employee engagement are generally espoused, but the degree to which management withholds critical economic information from employees strongly suggests that the culture of management subtly but firmly supports the assumption that management still has the “divine right to tell others what to do” (Schein, 1989).

We concede that Humble Leadership defined as an intrinsically relational process that is deeply embedded in effective group processes, does not displace other models built on individual heroic visions or purposes. Transformational and servant leadership models are highly relevant for today’s organizations, but we believe that all these models will require Humble Leadership as a foundational group process. We believe that all modern leadership models can be complemented with a more *personal relational* emphasis if they are to be relevant to an emerging cohort of modern leaders. To this end we introduce the concept *personalization* to highlight the essence of Level 2 Humble Leadership.

How This Book Is Organized

In Chapters 1 and 2 we will describe our vision of Humble Leadership and the relationship theory that serves as the foundation. We will share some stories in Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6 that illuminate what we see as Humble Leadership success, as well as cases where Humble Leadership did not develop, was stifled, or did not succeed. We will then look ahead in Chapter 7 to highlight some trends we see forcing and reinforcing here-and-now humility, *personalization*, group sensemaking, and team learning, all the key components of Humble Leadership. In Chapter 8 we will suggest how Humble Leadership and related group dynamics theory may advance our thinking about broader managerial culture, and in Chapter 9 we will propose what you can do by way of further reading, self-analysis, and skill building to enhance your own Humble Leadership proficiency.

This page intentionally left blank

ONE

A New Approach to Leadership

This book introduces a new approach to leadership based more on *personal* relationships than *transactional role* relationships.

The *good* news: employee engagement, empowerment, organizational agility, ambidexterity, innovation...all of this can flourish in the rapidly changing world when the fundamental relationship between leaders and followers, helpers and clients, and providers and customers becomes more personalized and cooperative.

The *bad* news: continued deception, scandals, high turnover of disengaged talent, safety and quality problems in industry and health care, all the way to corruption and abuse of power at the highest levels of industry and politics, driven by financial expediency and the obsession with retaining power as primary success criteria...all of this will continue to happen as long as leader-follower relationships remain impersonal, transactional, and based on the roles and rules that have evolved in the current culture of management that still predominates in our hierarchical bureaucratic organizations.