

Eight must-read books on leadership

Randall S Peterson, Professor of Organisational Behaviour at LBS shortlists eight inspiring reads on leadership
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"These works are not musings," says Randall S Peterson. "They are the collective leadership lessons from case studies and life experiences, of some of the most infamous figureheads, spanning history."

1. Authentic Leadership: Courage in Action by Robert W. Terry (1993)

What is leadership without action? Robert Terry's book is an example of authenticity in its truest form. Authentic Leadership provides a practical set of tools and methodologies for leaders to reference and enhance their everyday actions. Terry contends that leadership is co-dependent: on the ability to frame issues correctly, as well as to call forth an authentic response. The base material considers traits – courage, vision, ethics, and spirituality – which together, create a foundation for sustained, effective leadership.

2. Servant Leadership by Robert Greenleaf (1977)

Robert Greenleaf had great faith that servant-leader organisations could change the world.

In his second major essay, 'The Institution as Servant' (1972), he recognised that organisations, as well as individuals could be servant-leaders. There he said: "This is my thesis: caring for persons, the more able and the less able serving each other, is the rock upon which a good society is built." Traditional leadership involves the exercise of power by one at the "top of the pyramid." By comparison, the servant-leader shares power, puts the needs of others first, and helps perform at the highest level. This is not a bible of ancient philosophy; it is a set of leadership practices.

3. The Art of War by Sun Tzu (5th century BC)

Strategy isn't a matter of list-making, it is the preparation to react swiftly and appropriately to any given situation. This ancient Chinese military manual has been the source of inspiration for notable leaders from Napoleon and General MacArthur to Marc Benioff and Bill Belichick. Comprised of 13 sections, each dedicated to a different aspect of battle strategy, the book is packed with timeless insights for setting and achieving goals – the ancient art of executing strategy for success.

4. The Prince by Niccolo Machiavelli (1532)

Machiavellianism is one of our darkest personality traits. Though no person would profess a desire for a 'Machiavellian' boss, one with disregard for morality, with a focus on self-interest and personal gain, the Italian philosopher's controversial treatise remains a timeless reference for understanding such leaders. Machiavelli argues the merits of being loved, feared and hated. Thought, in the end, he calls for leaders to strive to be loved.

5. Endurance: Shackleton's Incredible Voyage by Alfred Lansing (1959)

Courage, positivity and decisiveness: three traits of any hero. This against-all-odds survival tale of explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton and his 27-member crew, is an enduring leadership allegory. When the 1914 Antarctic voyage remained trapped for over a year in an ice floe, Shackleton's extraordinary leadership efforts is said to have almost singlehandedly saved the lives of his entire crew. The story's lesson: to motivate and inspire in the face of extremity, in this case, the bitter cold and life-threatening deprivation.

6. Never Give In! The Best of Winston Churchill's Speeches by Winston S Churchill (2003)

"We shall fight on the beaches. We shall fight on the landing grounds. We shall fight in the fields, and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills. We shall never surrender!"

With no speechwriters or spin-doctors, this collection of speeches is an incredible reminder of Churchill's ability to inspire. A masterclass in energy and charisma, these rousing addresses span Churchill's career from World War I to his honorary induction as a US citizen in 1963. We look for business leaders with resilience and courage, and in the face of grave uncertainty, an impending Nazi invasion, and bombings in London, Churchill exuded both.

7. Primal Leadership: Unleashing the Power of Emotional Intelligence by Daniel Goleman (2002)

If you could bottle and sell emotional intelligence, some say you'd have a winning formula. In this analytical take on managerial success, the psychologist credited with popularising the concept of 'emotional intelligence' applies his theory to leadership. Through dozens of case studies, Goleman builds the case that the best leaders are able to channel their feelings. Primal leaders radiate what he calls "resonance": the capacity to inspire.

8. Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln by Doris Kearns Goodwin (2005)

In 2008, President Obama chose this book as the one he would take into the White House, after the bible. Leaders today must make a decision: to surround themselves with ambitious, strong-willed personalities, or, employ more submissive teams. Lincoln chose to be challenged. And social sciences research spanning 50 years supports his view. Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Kearns Goodwin recalls Lincoln's incredible ability to unite his team: it was through his intricate understanding of human behaviour that he bridged vastly divergent personalities and ideologies.