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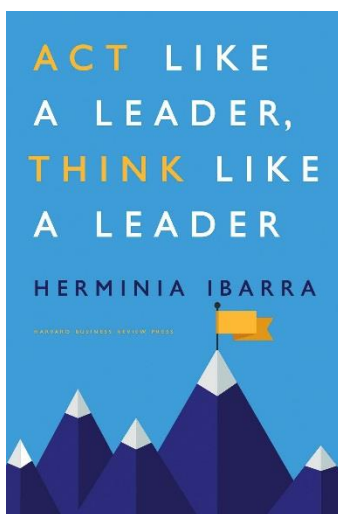
The Centre for Army Leadership (CAL) is the British Army's custodian of leadership debate, thinking and doctrine. It seeks to stimulate discussion about leadership and so further the institution's knowledge of best practice and experience.

Book Reviews are written by and for serving soldiers and officers, summarising a wide range of notable leadership-related books.

Act like a Leader, Think like a Leader

by Herminia Ibarra

Reviewed by Capt Alexander Shand REME



Herminia Ibarra is an expert on professional and leadership development. She is the Cora Chaired Professor of Leadership and Learning at INSEAD, the founding director of The Leadership Transition executive education programme at INSEAD, and the author of Working Identity: Unconventional Strategies for Reinventing your Career.

All of the leadership books that I have read to date aimed at providing you with theories and tools that can be employed to improve leadership potential or be more effective within your organisation. These books tend to be based around the conventional method of learning theories and then putting them into practice. On the other hand, *Act Like a Leader, Think Like a Leader* looks to challenge this method of leadership development based around the theory of "Outsight". With this theory you are encouraged to see leadership growth as something that is achieved from the outside in, and not the reverse. The Outsight principle is based around altering your self-identity through small yet impactful changes that will transform your perception of personal limitations. As the book title suggests, Herminia Ibarra holds the belief that the most effective way to do this is "to plunge yourself into new projects and activities,

interact with very different kinds of people, and experiment with unfamiliar ways of getting things done”. There are three basic pillars of Oversight detailed within the book:

1. Redefine your job
2. Redefine your network (network across and out)
3. Redefine yourself (be more playful with yourself)

The key aim of *Act Like a Leader, Think Like a Leader* is to force the reader to understand that the leadership approach that has brought them success so far, may not be fit for purpose when they step up to a new role. How can they change to meet the challenge?

Redefining your job (Chapter 2)

This chapter describes the trap that many of us in leadership roles fall into; thinking in the operational sense and neglecting the strategic. Ibarra highlights that “we have difficulty making the transition from work firmly rooted in our own functional knowledge or expertise to work that depends on guiding diverse parties, many outside of our direct control, to a shared goal”. Ibarra points to MIT studies that have shown how the most effective leaders are not those who follow conventional wisdom on leading a team (managing internal dynamics, setting clear goals etc) but those who act as a bridge to the team’s external environment. Aligning your team’s goals with the wider organization, enabling information streams, and gleaning best practices from other teams saw the leader and the team work far more effectively in the strategic context.

You are provided with five things to improve and assist in becoming more active with external engagement;

1. Develop your **external sensors**
2. get involved in projects **outside** of your area
3. participate in **extracurricular activities**
4. communicate your **personal why**
5. **create slack** in your schedule

Described as the “competency trap”, we are introduced to the one of the most common issues facing leaders in today’s working environment; time. Creating “white space” in your schedule is a battle that all leaders face regularly, and the answer according to Ibarra is to invest time into projects and tasks outside of your immediate environment. This will lead you to redefine what is important and allow you to reduce time wasted on the activities that do not improve the impact that you and your team has on the wider organisation.

Network across and out (Chapter 3)

A “lazy and narcissistic” approach to networking describes how we have a tendency for attraction to those like us and who are geographically close. Using networks is a key component of leadership according to Ibarra who highlights the benefits as:

- Sensing trends and seeing opportunities
- Building ties to opinion leaders and talent in diverse areas
- Working collaboratively across boundaries to create more value
- Avoiding groupthink
- Generating breakthrough ideas
- Obtaining career opportunities

It is clear therefore that a wide reaching and diverse network is key to success as a leader.

The view that networking is a self-serving task in which we are ‘using’ someone to further our aims or career is attacked. The belief that relationships should be formed spontaneously, and that networking is not real work, is referred to as a trap and that you should continuously look to grow your operational, personal and strategic networks. There are three qualities that make a strong network according to Ibarra:

- Breadth
- Connectivity
- Dynamism

These are investigated in detail with a chance for you to measure your own *Network Density* as a catalyst for movement to change.

Be more playful with yourself (Chapter 4)

Possibly the most difficult concept to enact lies in Chapter 4. Based around redefining yourself, the idea starts by separating people into two categories; chameleons and true-to-selfers.

The chameleons being those who can adapt their stylistic approach to a given subject and can experiment with new ways of behaving.

True-to-selfers are those who focus on being themselves and on what they know.

In line with the theme of change throughout the book, the desire to remain “authentic” is seen as counter-productive to growth into a leadership role. Acknowledging the illusion of feeling like a fake when you adapt to match the styles of role models leads Ibarra to tell us to *steal like an artist* because nothing is original, and you should copy your heroes. That is not to say that

you are to become that person, rather than you should transform yourself through the study of many influences (with credit given where appropriate). You are guided through the feeling of discomfort in acting like a phoney and encouraged to act like the person you want to be and not the one that has seen success come your way so far. The most interesting recommendation in this chapter and possibly the book, is that we should be setting *learning* goals not *performance* goals. Choose tasks that will help you learn and not those that will make you look good. This will see you develop and extend the possibilities for yourself.

Conclusion

Act Like a Leader, Think Like a Leader is an exciting and fresh way to look at how you can prepare to step into a new leadership role, or to improve the way in which you perform in the current one. Three easy to remember areas to redefine your role (Job, Network and Self), are backed through the author's stories of success and frustration. This book is a perfect read for those who feel that they are not quite getting their role right, those about to promote or move to a new job that may have different requirements, or ideally those who want to look to the future and ensure that they have the ability to transition to a position of higher responsibility quickly and seamlessly.

Herminia Ibarra

Act Like a Leader, Think Like a Leader

Harvard Business Review Press, 2015

*The views expressed in **Book Reviews** are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official thinking of the British Army or the Ministry of Defence. Get our Book Reviews at www.army.mod.uk/who-we-are/our-schools-and-colleges/centre-for-army-leadership/centre-for-army-leadership-support-documents or at this QR code:*

