



Book Review: *Leading Leaders*

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Over the last few years, many books have been written about leadership. It seems everyone who has ever held a position of power in politics, great economic institutions or the military has written about how to lead others, whether in government, business or war.

A professor of law at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, Jeswald W. Salacuse, has written a book, *Leading Leaders*, that uses examples from all three areas, but goes beyond the usual discussion of how to lead. It focuses on how to lead *leaders*, those individuals who are often highly educated experts, investors, government officials, doctors or lawyers.

How does one guide these smart, talented, rich and powerful individuals when the leader has little authority over them, the “followers” have options outside the organization and thus have a strong sense of independence from both the organization and the leader, and when the supposed followers have their own followers and constituents? Sounds like the issues one would face leading a school board, even though the members may not exactly fit into the “talented, rich and powerful” category (I assume all board members are “smart”).

Herding Cats

If leadership is often seen as “herding cats”, as Professor Salacuse makes clear, leading these “elites” is like herding a whole different breed of cat.

Certainly school boards are different than some of the elites that Salacuse discusses. He uses university politics, the differences between how the two presidents named Bush fought wars with Iraq and how Citigroup dealt with scandals in Japan to make his points. However, I found much of what he wrote to be equally applicable to boards of education and running school districts.

Those on boards come from nearly every walk of life and while some may fit into the category of doctor or lawyer, rich or very powerful, others may not. The truth is that by virtue of their election or appointment,

all board members are leaders. Although superintendents and board chairs would be the obvious “leaders” on any school board, the lessons contained in the book are helpful for anyone who wants to move an issue or agenda forward or gain a higher position in the context of board or district service.

Salacuse states that in order to lead leaders, the leader must carry out the “Seven Daily Tasks of Leadership”:

1. **Direction** – how do you negotiate a vision for the organization that other leaders will buy into?
2. **Integration** – how do you make the individual “stars” in your organization into a team?
3. **Mediation** – how do you resolve conflicts over turf and power among other leaders so the organization can move forward?
4. **Education** – how do you educate those who think they are already educated?
5. **Motivation** – how do you move other leaders who already “seem to have everything” to do the right thing for the organization?
6. **Representation** – how do you lead your organization’s outside constituents while still leading leaders inside?
7. **Trust creation** – how do you gain and keep other leaders’ trust?

Salacuse comes back to the point, again and again, that people follow a leader because “*they believe it is in their interests to do so*”. Interests drive actions. Thus, for the leader, it is imperative that he or she gets to know the followers so that the leader can determine how to best work with each one. This is not about manipulation; it is about building relationships with the persons you lead or want to lead.

Building Relationships

How do you build these relationships? You do so primarily with good communications, often on a one-to-one basis. The leader has to engage the “followers” in ways that will help you understand each person’s interests and communicate “commitment, reliability, and respect in satisfying those interests”.

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Trust is crucial to leading leaders over whom one has little or no authority, since in these situations, “the reason that you have the power of leadership is that the persons you lead have given it to you”. Salacuse states that “it is a basic principle of leadership that the less authority you have over the people you lead, the more you will need their trust to lead them.”

To Salacuse, building trust requires the leader allowing the followers to get to know the leader so that they can evaluate the leader’s intentions and the impact the leader may have on their interests. It also requires openness and “a willingness to involve... followers in the decisions... made on their behalf”.

He describes how to handle conflicts of interest when the leader’s interests don’t jibe with that of the organization or the followers. He talks about losing the trust of the followers and the “leader’s mandate,” that is, the authorization “general or specific, formal or informal” from the people that are led to act on their behalf. It also contains discussion on how to build coalitions and to do the work required by the leader with other organizations. This is the “representation” task noted above.

Education

Salacuse discusses the task of educating the followers, many of whom will already believe, by virtue of the other things they have done in life, that they are already educated. He states that the leader should

believe he or she is not only a teacher, but the “manager of the education process”.

It is critical to know the students so as to tie in the material with their inter-ests, but not to treat them as “students”, because elites will see being treated in that way as a diminution of their prestige and power and they will resist. Likewise, it is probably never wise to call it “train-ing”, since that implies a teacher-student relationship and treats leaders as students. He encourages leaders to educate on a one-to-one basis wherever possible, rather than in groups. He also makes it clear that how you frame the material will be crucial in determining whether the followers will attend the “professional development” activity and if so, whether they will really allow them-selves to learn.

The book is relatively short, only a little over 200 pages, not like some other “tomes” on leadership. It concludes with a list of other works on leadership. It is easy reading and contains a very well-organized series of chapters (including conclusions at the end of each), which lay out how to lead.

I would recommend it to board members who aspire to leadership positions or want to know how to best influence those around them. The book is pretty nearly a “must read” for board chairs and superintendents who must lead their own “boards of leaders”.

Originally printed in the January 2006 CABA Journal.