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Ethics, the Heart of Leadership

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Ethics, the Heart of Leadership

Third Edition

Joanne B. Ciulla, Editor

Foreword by James MacGregor Burns

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Introduction

Joanne B. Ciulla

Some people become leaders because they develop or possess certain talents and dispositions, charisma, or passions, or because of their wealth, military might, job title, or family name. Others lead because they possess great minds and ideas or they tell compelling stories. And then there are those who stumble into leadership because of the times they live in or the circumstances in which they find themselves. No matter how people become leaders, no one is a leader without willing followers. Managers, coaches, generals, and others may act like playground bullies and use their power and rank to force their will on people, but this is coercion, not leadership. Leadership is not a person or a position. It is a complex moral relationship between people, based on trust, obligation, commitment, emotion, and a shared vision of the good. Ethics is about how we distinguish between right and wrong, or good and evil in relation to the actions, volitions, and characters of human beings. Ethics lie at the heart of all human relationships and hence at the heart of the relationship between leaders and followers. The chapters in this volume explore the ethical complexities of leadership.

I dedicate this book to James MacGregor Burns because his theory of transforming leadership rests on the ongoing moral relationship

of leaders and followers. In his book, *Leadership*, Burns describes transforming leadership as a relationship in which leaders and followers morally elevate each other. Leadership for Burns is about change and sharing common purposes and values. The transforming leader helps people change for the better and empowers them to improve their lives and the lives of others.

In the foreword to this book, Burns laments that the authors in this volume do not make a crisp distinction between ethical and moral leadership and that they fail to consistently use the terms. If you look the words up, you will see that ethics is defined as morals and morals as ethics. In ancient times, the Romans translated the Greek word *ethikos* into the Latin word *morale*. In the foreword Burns's definitions of *ethical virtues*, *ethical values*, and *moral values* may be different from the way other writers in this book define them, but rather than quibble over terms, let us look at what he means. For Burns, the values of moral leadership are those of the enlightenment, liberty, equality, and community. This is a big-picture view of the ultimate ends of leadership. Most authors in this book probably believe in these ideals, just as they would agree that leaders should be honest, fair, and just. Nevertheless, in ethics, as with many things, the devil is in the details. The chapters in this book probe the details of the many aspects of ethics and leadership.

In the beginning I said no one is a leader without willing followers. Most people agree that coercion is not leadership, but what is coercion and what is a willing follower? How do we draw the moral line between free will and subtle forms of manipulation, deception, and the pressure that group norms place on the individual? Similarly, few would argue with Burns's idea that the leadership relationship should be one that morally elevates both parties, but here again, the details matter. Elevate from what to what? Who determines which moral values are better and what are the criteria for better values? What if people don't want to be elevated? What if they incorrectly understand the common good? Authors in this collection treat questions like this in different ways.

The chapters in this book touch on three very general facets of leadership ethics.

1. The ethics of the means: How do leaders motivate followers to obtain their goals? What is the moral relationship between leaders and followers?
2. The ethics of the person: Do leaders have to be saints?

3. The ethics of the ends: What is the ethical value of a leader's accomplishments? Did his/her actions serve the greatest good? What is the greatest good? Who is and isn't part of the greatest good?

These may all seem like obvious questions until you consider cases where a leader is ethical in some of these areas but not in others. For example, some leaders may be personally ethical but use unethical means to achieve ethical ends; other leaders may be personally unethical, but use ethical means, to achieve ethical ends, and so forth. This raises the question, Do leaders have to be ethical in all three areas to be ethical? Some might argue the only thing that matters is what the leader accomplishes. Others might argue that the means and ends are ethically important, but the personal morality of a leader is not.

The chapters in this collection examine the ethical challenges of leadership. The first section of the book provides two overviews of ethics and leadership, one from the perspective of leadership studies and one from business ethics perspective. In the first chapter, I extensively revised and updated my original article, written in 1995, called "Leadership Ethics: Mapping the Territory." I still argue that a greater understanding of ethics will improve our understanding of leadership and discuss why questions about the definition of leadership are really about what constitutes good leadership, where the word *good* refers to both ethics and effectiveness. There is much more research on ethics in leadership studies since I wrote the original article. I critically discuss this literature and to make the case for why leadership studies need research from the humanities as well as leadership ethics. Al Gini and Ronald M. Green have extensively rewritten and updated the chapter on the intersection of business ethics and leadership studies (Chapter 2). They offer an excellent profile of the issues and literature in both fields. They emphasize the role that "the witness of moral leadership" plays in improving the standards of business, organizations, and everyday life.

The second section of the book is about the relationship between leaders and followers. Distinguished leadership scholar Edwin P. Hollander examines the ethical challenges of authority and power in the leader-follower relationship. He argues that we need an inclusive leadership, which he describes as "[d]oing things *with* people, rather than *to* people." Hollander's chapter is about organizations, but it also has implications for the increasing disparities of wealth and power in many societies today. My chapter on "bogus empowerment" is about

honesty and the distribution of power in the leader-follower relationship. I examine the failure of empowerment schemes in the workplace and argue that empowerment aimed at making people feel good, but not at giving them resources and real discretion, is bogus. Real empowerment requires honesty and a full understanding of how the redistribution of power changes the leader-follower relationship. Robert C. Solomon's chapter analyzes the role of emotions in the leader-follower relationship. He begins by exploding what he calls the myth of charisma. According to Solomon, charisma is not a quality of a leader's character nor is it an essential element of leadership. He believes it is a general and "vacuous" way of talking about the complex emotional relationship of leaders to followers that is empty of moral content. He argues that trust is the emotional core of the leader-follower relationship and that we can better understand this relationship by looking at how the leaders and the led give trust to others.

The third section on the morality of leaders is new. Both authors look at this issue in terms of ethics and what it takes for a leader to effectively lead. Terry L. Price explores the provocative question about "whether leaders ought to be moral saints." So much of the leadership literature talks about leaders as role models and moral exemplars. Price offers practical and moral reasons for why leaders do not have to be saints and concludes that "We can expect leaders to work within the bounds of morality, but we cannot expect them to do all that is within their power never to approach morality's limits." In a similar vein, Nannerl O. Keohane raises the question, "Must a political leader who wants to govern effectively be prepared to behave immorally?" The answer, she says, is not a simple yes or no. In it she discusses what philosophers call "the dirty hands problem." This is when a leader faces an ethical dilemma and is forced to pick one among several unsavory options. Keohane uses Max Weber's "ethic of responsibility" to examine the situations in which leaders should be held responsible or allowed to have dirty hands in a democracy.

The final section of the book is about the ethical influence of leaders. Popular media, communitarian writers, and recent management literature suggest that communities and organizations are rife with social interest groups who pursue their own selfish interests without regard for the common good. Burns, along with other scholars, believes transformational leadership offers a solution to this problem because it refocuses people's attention on higher goals and collective interests.

Michael Keeley thinks this is a dangerous solution, one that James Madison and the Constitutional Convention of 1787 sought to thwart. Using examples from the organizational literature as well as history, Keeley argues that it is better to accommodate factions and individual interests by building them into the leader-follower relationship. For Keeley, a system of checks and balances is morally better than transforming people so that they share the same higher collective goals. In foreign policy the problems of factions take on new meaning because of the competing interests of nations and groups within them. In another new addition to the book, Joseph S. Nye, Jr., examines how leaders develop ethical and unethical foreign policies. In a chapter rich with examples of leaders and the ways they pursue foreign policy, Nye argues that there is little evidence that leaders with transformational objectives or inspirational styles are more effective or ethical. He argues that because the context of foreign policy is highly complex, it is sometimes better to have a leader who is not a visionary but a "careful gardener."

What is clear from all of these chapters is that the morality of leadership depends on the particulars of the relationship between people. It matters who the leaders and followers are, how well they understand and feel about themselves and each other, and the context of their relationship. It depends on whether leaders and followers are honest and trustworthy, and most importantly, what they do and what they value. Behind all of these things are broad philosophic questions such as: What is the common good? Do people have free will? How should we treat one another? What should be like? Who deserves what? These are eternal questions that have kept generations of leaders and thinkers up late at night. The chapters in this book probe what the answers to these questions mean for today's leaders. They offer the reader hands-on insights into the ethical dynamics that make the heart of leadership tick.