

Leadership: The Art of Inspiring People to Be Their Best

by Major General Craig B. Whelden

New Insights Press

book review by Jordana Landsman

"Getting people to follow you is a function of inspiring the loyalty of those being led, and understanding what expectations THEY have of the type of leader they are willing to follow."

Drawing from his long, accomplished career in military and government leadership, Major General Whelden blends leadership principles with memoir in this thoughtful, inspiring collection that reflects on positive ways to get the best from people and get good work done in any organization or role. Whelden knows his subject well from his long and decorated career in military service and then government leadership. Having served thirty years as an Army officer and nearly a decade in the Senior Executive Service of the federal government, he held leadership positions of tremendous and material authority, leading people, projects, operations, bases, and more.

The book moves swiftly, with a friendly tone, in engaging, conversational chapters that cover a satisfying variety of leadership keys and concepts. For every facet of good leadership he observed over the course of his career, Whelden has substantive, relatable stories to tell, both about how he learned and acted in various situations and about the wisdom he gained and shared. Where some how-to books from experts veer unhelpfully into a narrative that boils down to "be like me," Whelden's more reflective approach speaks to the potential leader in anyone with basics that he demonstrates can apply in any situation.

The content is not necessarily new: trust your people, manage risk, be loyal, set expectations, manage the tough times, handle change well, etc. However, the distinction here is Whelden himself and his fundamental view that successful leadership happens by inspiring and motivating others. Indeed, at its core, this is a book about approaching every situation, no matter how daunting or high profile, from the perspective of building up and supporting others to achieve for the collective common good. While Whelden knows better than most that the goal of military leadership is defense and safekeeping, his view of successful leadership is how to build up people and teams to do and feel their best and therefore achieve organizational objectives.

Whelden credits mentors and other influencers for shaping his leadership style. He gives credit where it is due, even as he shares his personal adaptation and implementation of others' processes. This humble perspective is reminiscent of Jim Wilson's classic leadership book *Good to Great*, where he and his team of researchers analyzed the attributes of successful leaders whose organizations maintained long histories of good and then great performance. One of their findings was that while celebrity CEOs (think Lee Iacocca and more recently Mark Zuckerberg or Elon Musk) gather attention and notoriety, it is the quiet, unknown, unflashy, dedicated leaders toiling without fuss and planning for their successions who deliver the best leadership results. This viewpoint seems to be in line with Whelden's own thinking.

Indeed, part of what sets Whelden's narrative apart is the way he pairs buck-stops-here leadership with an enduring subordination to the chain of command, flexibility in the face of change, and a constant awareness of his role as a component, not an island, within the large, complex machines of military and government. This "company man" perspective is powerful and persuasive when paired with the extraordinary accomplishments of Whelden's career. Inspirational and informational, Whelden's book is truly a worthwhile read.

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