



In this series edition

The Mediator as Leader and the Leader as Mediator: Building Skills in Ubiquitous, Collaborative, Democratic Leadership

By Kenneth Cloke & Joan Goldsmith

"I do not determine what is right and wrong by looking at the budget of my organization or by taking a Gallup poll of the majority opinion. Ultimately a genuine leader is not a searcher for consensus but a molder of consensus." - Martin Luther King, Jr

"It is not so much the powerful leaders that determine our destiny as the much more powerful influence of the combined voice of the people themselves." - Eleanor Roosevelt

"Becoming a leader is synonymous with becoming yourself. It is precisely that simple and it is also that difficult." - Warren Bennis

Democracy and mediation are collaborative forms of self-government that uniquely invite everyone to participate in leadership, and "followership" as well. As both thrive on diversity, they require leaders who can offer diverse ideas, talents, perspectives, cultures, and values, and

blend them together to form an integrated, dynamic, collaborative whole. Democracies and mediations need leaders who stand with, not over, above, or against people who choose whether to follow.

For this reason, democracies and mediations—whether in couples, families, teams, groups, neighborhoods, organizations, or governments—require leaders who can listen, empower others, generate trust, build relationships, negotiate collaboratively, and resolve conflicts—i.e., ubiquitous leaders who can follow and build consensus. Therefore, democratic leaders are mediators, and mediators are democratic leaders.

Unlike hierarchical, bureaucratic, and autocratic forms of leadership, democratic and mediative leadership is exercised not only at the top, but at the bottom and throughout. Both seek to balance power and challenge the very existence of “top” and “bottom.” In democracies, as in mediation, everyone needs to become a responsible, collaborative leader, a team member who helps run the show.

Mediators and democratic leaders embody a commitment to values, ethics, and integrity. They inspire collaboration, stimulate synergistic connections, support honest interactions, build trusting relationships, and encourage self-management, diversity, and integration across boundaries. They connect people through problem solving, dialogue, and collaboration so they can intelligently seek solutions. They synthesize diverse approaches, theories, orientations, and discoveries; spark innovation, and create synergies

that strengthen consensus and inspire collaboration.

Mediators and leaders cross boundaries. They elicit participation, invigorate collaboration, develop fresh ideas, and excite action. They encourage authenticity and integrity, and model the values and principles to which they are committed. They consider themselves responsible for the whole and accountable to others for the results they produce. They blaze trails to unknown, unimagined futures. They are often ubiquitous, without grand titles or designations, and sometimes present without anyone knowing it, in groups at every level.

The more agile, responsive, and creative organizations become, the less possible it is for leaders (or mediators) to be imposed on passive subordinates from above. In order to function, they need to obtain the consent of those with and for whom they work. Certainly, management should have a role in identifying the leaders it needs, but theirs should not be the only voice. Those who are led should also be able to select the leaders they will follow.

People’s needs for leadership and mediation in organizations or government can change rapidly. At any moment, they may need innovative leaders who help search for unseen answers to questions that have not been formulated;

or leaders who are comfortable with diverse constituents, cultures, skill sets, and thinking styles; or leaders who are skilled communicators and can create connections, promote

collaboration, and build alliances; or leaders who can link them together; or leaders who can act decisively.

Mediators and democratic leaders need to be diverse not only in race, gender, age, culture, and sexual orientation, but in experience, perceptions, thinking preferences, communication styles, character, emotional makeup, skill sets, and personalities. The best strategy is to have a rich, broad array of mediation and leadership styles available on call.

Managers vs. Leaders

Warren Bennis and Joan Goldsmith in *Learning to Lead: A Workbook on Becoming a Leader*, presented several distinctions between managers and leaders, based on Warren's research, including these:

- The manager administrates; the leader innovates.
- The manager is a copy; the leader is an original.
- The manager maintains; the leader develops.
- The manager accepts reality; the leader investigates it.
- The manager focuses on systems and structure; the leader focuses on people.
- The manager relies on control; the leaders inspire trust.
- The manager has a short-range view; the leader has a long-range perspective.
- The manager asks how and when; the leaders ask what and why.
- The manager has his/her eye always on the bottom line; the leader has his/her eye on the horizon.
- The manager imitates; the leader originates.

- The manager accepts the status quo; the leader challenges it.
- The manager is the classic good soldier; the leader is his own person.
- The manager does things right; the leader does the right thing.

In your work and life, which are you? Leadership is a *skill* that is not inborn, dependent on money, power, or titles. It is something everyone does at multiple points throughout their lives, whether they regard themselves as leaders or not. We have all led someone somewhere sometime, and can do it again—consciously, collaboratively, and effectively.

Styles and Competencies

Some skills, competencies, behaviors, and traits can be mandated by others, such as attendance ("Be here at 8:00 a.m."), sequential actions ("Do this first and that second"), politeness ("Don't yell"), and repetitive movements ("Tighten this nut"). But there are others that *cannot* be mandated, lie entirely beyond autocracy's reach, and must instead be led, facilitated, encouraged, supported, mentored, coached, or mediated, such as:

Trust	Love
Caring	Dedication
Creativity	Self-management
Curiosity	Honesty
Insight	Courage
Synergy	Empathy
Integrity	Compassion
Consensus	Understanding
Craftsmanship	Wisdom
Values	Passion
Perseverance	Forgiveness
Initiative	Unity

Flow
Collaboration

Trustworthiness
Follow-through

These are the most important elements in every relationship. Yet hierarchy, bureaucracy, and autocracy, in families, organizations or governments, interfere with *all* of them. This does not mean creativity and trust cannot be enhanced, but they cannot be *commanded*, controlled, ordered, predicted, mandated, regulated, administered, or required because they depend on voluntary, spontaneous, unregulated, collaborative *activity*; on choice, and play.

For these reasons, democratic and mediated relationships require a combination of skills in diversity, consensus, dialogue, teamwork, and collaborative negotiation to support participation in joint problem solving and group decision-making.

We find it useful to distinguish three basic styles of leadership: *autocratic*, hierarchical, controlling leaders who take responsibility and make decisions for others; *anarchic*, bureaucratic, detached leaders who administer but abdicate responsibility and let others take the blame; and *democratic*, ubiquitous, collaborative, linking, mediating leaders who inspire, encourage, empower, facilitate, critique, unite, and support, and take final responsibility for decision making, together with others. The ancient Chinese sage Lao Tzu described three similar forms of leadership:

“The best of all rulers is but a shadowy presence to his subjects. Next comes the ruler they love and praise; Next comes one they fear; Next comes one with whom they take liberties”

Ubiquitous leadership is precisely a “shadowy presence” that is everywhere in all groups at all times, and feels as though it happens naturally. It is always available, especially in emergencies. It is democratic, and not divided by status, wealth, power, or privilege from those who follow.

The primary competencies of leadership, identified by Warren Bennis and Joan Goldsmith in *Learning to Lead*, (number 6 was added by us) are:

1. *Mastering The Context*: Understanding the big picture, considering political, economic, social issues, along with science and art; and taking time to learn.
2. *Knowing Ourselves*: Being aware of neurophysiological patterns and our own issues that are triggered by people in conflict; understanding our limits and skills.
3. *Creating Visions and Communicating Meaningfully*: Focusing on the future, having an inspiring vision and being able to communicate it so others can align and collaboratively implement it.
4. *Empowering Others through Empathy, Integrity and Constancy*: Building trust through empathy, empowerment, unconditional integrity, and congruence in beliefs and actions.
5. *Realizing Intentions through Action*: Turning visions into practical solutions, commitment, and strategy; realizing intentions through action.
6. *Preventing and Resolving Conflicts through Collaboration*: Preventing and resolving conflicts through systems design, consensus, collaboration, and shared values.

At a deep level, the values, behaviors, and skills of leaders and mediators cannot be fragmented or separated from one another, any more than leaders can be separated from followers or mediators from conflicted parties. *Linking* leaders deploy their skills strategically to build and sustain collaborative, self-managing possibilities. To do so, they require the following skills:

- *Character skills*, which build integrity through self-knowledge, ethical sensitivity, values-based actions, personal balance, kindness, spiritual openness, trustworthiness, and responsibility
- *Relational skills*, which sustain connections among people through dialogue, social inclusion, consensus, acknowledgment, constructive feedback, and collaborative problem solving
- *Mediation skills*, which turn conflicts into opportunities, link honesty and empathy, offer supportive confrontation, elicit courageous dissent, and value diversity, emotional intelligence, empathetic listening, interest-based negotiations, and conflict resolution
- *Wisdom skills*, which increase understanding, such as imagination, intuition, judgment, innovation, critical reasoning, paradoxical problem solving, and revolutionary strategic planning
- *Communication skills*, which motivate people to act, such as involving others, building coalitions, facilitating, coaching, mentoring, nurturing talent, inspiring passion, and empowering leadership
- *Action skills*, which commit to achieving dramatic results, such as dedication, re-

sponsibility, self-correction, concern for quality, commitments, perseverance, and evaluating results

Everyone can improve their skills. When it comes to something they *want* to do, people regularly take responsibility, act creatively, solve problems, collaborate to achieve common goals, build consensus, and resolve conflicts. Here is a different view of the skills of democratic mediator-leaders:

- *Linking Integrity with Behavior: Skills in Leading by Values*: Leading by values means empowering others, encouraging self-management, and helping people define and express themselves in diverse ways. It means building trust, communicating honestly and empathetically, and inspiring personal commitment. It means being true to one's self.
- *Linking Change with Ideas: Skills in Revolutionary Thinking*: Revolutionary thinking begins with utopian vision, and seeks to translate it into reality. It means being open to ideas that fundamentally critique existing paradigms and seeking to transform them. It therefore originates in conflicts, anomalies, mistakes, disharmonies, and problems, and the sounds made by the cracks in a system.
- *Linking Feelings with Balance: Skills in Emotional Intelligence*: Democratic, collaborative, mediative leadership requires emotional intelligence because everyone is emotional, and all relationships need to be designed with human beings in mind.

- *Linking People with Each Other: Skills in Relationship Building:* Relationship skills are needed to balance unity and diversity, deepen trust and mutual support, keep collaboration alive, support difficult decisions, struggle for consensus, strengthen emotional intelligence, negotiate differences, and resolve conflicts in ways that repair relationships and end in forgiveness and reconciliation.
- *Linking Intention with Results: Skills in Committed Action:* Committed action requires democratic and mediator leaders to radically expand participation and available options, winnow them down through consensus, and design experiments or pilot projects if consensus fails.

To help build these skills, here are a few questions:

1. *If leaders are not born, how are they made?* Leaders are made by developing their capacity for vision, caring about people, commitment to results, integrity, and overcoming fear of failure. They do so by discovering how family patterns, childhood expectations, and incomplete experiences from the past block development of their leadership potential. They explore their attitudes toward failure and success, and what blocks their learning. They develop the skills, styles, modes of operating, expressions of values, and personal strategies that allow them to escape these patterns and create new ones.
2. *What is required to develop leadership?* As people identify their diverse leadership styles,

find out what they want or need to do, clarify what they are prepared to do to meet those wants and needs, specify what they plan to deliver, and commit to action, their leadership skills start to expand to fill the gaps.

3. *What is leadership by values?* Leadership by values is acting always on the basis of commitment and integrity. It is shaping a *context* of values, ethics, and integrity, making principles the basis for organizational decision making, and not considering oneself separate from the physical, cultural, social, and political environments in which one lives. It means being willing to take unpopular stands to support one's beliefs while keeping an open mind and being willing to listen to those who disagree.

4. *What obstructs walking the talk?* Mostly, pretending to be something or someone we are not, failing to acknowledge our shortcomings, hiding parts of ourselves, and suppressing our core values. It is losing touch with what it means to be a human being and turning people into roles and titles. It is ego, fear, anger, guilt, shame, and trying to be perfect. Walking the talk means not blaming others for our decisions or conditioning our integrity on someone else's choices.

5. *How do leaders respond to conflict?* Linking leaders see conflict as a sign that something is not working for someone, and turn conflicts into opportunities for learning, growth, and improvement. Leaders use conflict to expand their skills in communicating, creating new solutions, negotiating, mediating, and responding to difficult behaviors. They focus on problems, solutions, and the future.

6. *Is a balanced life possible for leaders?*

Most leaders encounter difficulties leading a balanced life. As leaders figure out how to free themselves from the need to control everything, be superstars, and do all things to all people, they find greater balance in their lives. Leaders need to be committed and responsible, but also authentic; achieve results, but also have values; assist others, but also expand their horizons; clarify their priorities and commitments, but also balance financial security and personal achievement with family life, community involvement, and spiritual growth.

7. *How do leaders learn to manage time?*

There is never enough time. Therefore, the issue is not how much time there is, which is fixed, but how to develop focus, identify priorities, cultivate patience and determination, and do so strategically. Leaders learn to manage time by filling their plate so full that they are forced to learn how to work more quickly -- or by learning to use delegation, education, and empowerment to replace themselves.

8. *Is there room at the top?* The top should not be the sole or primary location for strategic thinking and committed action. This is why democratic organizations require ubiquitous leaders and seek to eliminate the destructive competition for top positions that characterizes hierarchical leadership. Indeed, the first responsibility of democratic leaders is to replace themselves and help others step into their shoes. Linking leaders coach, guide, support, mentor, and counsel others on how to make a difference wherever they are, and share whatever they have learned.

9. *How should leaders respond to changes and losses?* Death, loss, and transition are natural experiences everywhere. Emotionally intelligent leaders and mediators develop skills in accepting these natural parts of life, pass these skills on to others, and use their experiences to increase their capacity for empathy, compassion, integrity, and presence.

10. *What are the most important responsibilities of leaders?* The most important responsibilities are not simply getting the work done, which is essential, but supporting everyone in reaching their full potential, improving their skills, and maximizing their capacity for finding joy in life.

Democracy and mediation require power sharing, and becoming *owners*, rather than renters, of our lives and relationships. Who needs to own and sustain these skills? The only answer in democracies and mediations, is *we* will, together.

About the Authors

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She wrote *Women Leaders at the Grassroots: 9 Stories and 9 Strategies*, and co-authored *Learning to Lead: A Coursebook on Becoming a Leader* with Warren Bennis. She co-authored the following books with Kenneth Cloke: *Thank God It's Monday! 14 Values We Need to Humanize the Way We Work*; *Resolving Personal And Organizational Conflict: Stories Of Transformation & Forgiveness*; *The End of Management and the Rise of Organizational Democracy*; *The Art of Waking People Up: Cultivating Awareness and Authenticity At Work*; *Resolving Conflicts At Work: Ten Strategies For Everyone On The Job*; and *Resolving Organizational Conflicts: A Course in Mediation and Systems Design*.



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