

ULTIMATE LEADERSHIP WINNING EXECUTION STRATEGIES FOR YOUR SITUATION

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INTRODUCTION

Undoubtedly one's training and experiences including education are critical platforms that create biases that later fashion your judgment, decision-making skills, competences, critical thinking and the interpretation of your social world, including the interpretation of reading materials. I was trained in the objectivistic epistemology (Crotty, 2005) – economics and statistics – and so the issue of proof, measurement, objective facts and testing of theories are very much how I interpret my world (Balashov and Rosenberg, 2002). Such an objectivistic epistemology means I am always looking out of issues, other studies, measurement, and little attention is any is place on personal tales or traditions. Hence, when I read the book 'Ultimate Leadership' by Russell Palmer it was totally contrary to my scholastic training or initial expectations. As an objectivist, I was socialized that academic or critical works must extend beyond 1) authority, 2) traditions, 3) personal opinions 4) common sense and 5) personal observations (Babbie, 2007; Balashov and Rosenberg, 2002; Berg, 2001; Crotty, 2005; Neuman, 2006); but Ultimate Leadership was a biographic account of Palmer's perspective on leadership from the vantage points of experience as well as the practice of other leaders drawn from private-and-public sector organizations. Initially, the book did not fulfill by objectivistic-scholastic bias as it was subjective accounts of authorities in leadership, with any context of empirical support.

Context Analyses

The more I immerse into the pages of the book, the less my bias was met and this continue for pages before two sentences changed my outlook. Palmer opines that "The best subject from an educational standpoint for a leader is the study of history. Reading biographies is also particularly helpful (Palmer, 2008, p. 57), which immediate strike a chord within me that personal experiences are real and must be included in scientific literature. It was Max Weber who says that people's meaning system and their lived experiences must be constituted as a part of science (Macionis and Gerber, 2010; Balashov and Rosenberg, 2002; Weber, 1949, 1974, 1981), which refocuses my perspective on examination of the material. The book is histographical accounts of leadership practices of practitioners in the area of leadership, the challenges, strategies, lessons and those of Russell Palmer. Palmer takes a totally different perspective on the examination of the phenomenon of leadership by focusing on practice instead of the normal abstract theoretical undertones. The book bears no resemblance of a textbook with quotations from other scholastic materials studies, textbook, journal articles and peer reviewed articles and this is a different, which got me in the first place.

Ultimate leadership is classified into three main sections 1) Unlocking the Secrets of Successful Leadership; 2) Mastering the Context of Leadership, and 3) The Wider View of Leadership, with a total of eleven chapters that constitute of 206 pages. Among the advantages of the book are the large print - 14 font- the summary at the end of each chapter, the summaries are

in bulletin form, the summaries are guidelines that have been employed by practitioners and few pages comprising of a chapter. The core of the book is context or contextual leadership, changing leadership styles based on the context, and how an effective leader must master all the elements of leadership; but must ensure that his/her understand the social context the people. All the chapters provide plethora of examples of practitioners' behaviour including pitfall, crises, challenges and methods applied in addressing various context in different organizations. While the illustrations are specific to the context, the author used the outcome as a historical referent and notes how the matter can be applied to similar context in contemporary organizations.

Clearly the use of past-and-current leaders in various organizations such as Larry Bossidy, former CEO of Honeywell; David M. Cote, current CEO of Honeywell; Tony Kobayashi, Chairman of Fuji Xerox; General P.X. Kelly, former Commandant of the Marine Corps; General Eric K. Shinseki, Joint Chief of Staff, US Military; John Dilulio, professor at University of Pennsylvania; Tom Enrlich, former provost of the University of Pennsylvania and former dean of Stanford Law School provide value perspective on the phenomenon of leaders from a practical perspectives with how then dealt with issues including crisis. The author skilfully crafted the interviews with the aforementioned practitioners in such a way that added insights into the broader perspective of leadership. Palmer is not a fictitious gentleman as he brings everything to the discourse including failure of those practitioners including himself and this brought deeper qualitative meaning to the discourse that would have avoided an objectivistic methodologist. The practitioners state their reasoning for particularly choices, the meaning behind decisions, and these would not have been captured in objectivism, which make the book of even deeper insights into why people do what they did.

The Other practiced-leaders provide rich insights into the issue of leadership and reader thoroughly understands why the author's core matter is contextual leadership. The book could have been titled 'Practice of Leadership: Issues, Benefits, Challenges and Recommendation'. Palmers brings his years of experience in leadership from accounting at Touche Ross; academics, dean of Wharton School of Business, University of Pennsylvania, and investment, Palmer Group to bear on the how leaders can be effective or otherwise. He notes that the same leader who may be effective in one organization, because of a certain leadership style, fails at another organization, because the individual fail to understand the context including the culture and the people. There is a profound perspective of the author that states, "There is no single style of leadership that works. But there are basic principles of leadership that all effective leaders apply regardless of their personal style of leadership" (Palmer, 2008). A careful analysis of the perspective of the author reveals the following 1) context, 2) practice, 3) leadership style, and 4) application. What stood out in the quotation is 'no single style of leadership that works', which supports the core perspective of the author about context. The reality is, not all contexts are the same and what obtains in one context may not applicable in a different context.

Palmer notes that while leaders must be cognizant of strategic management offers that the basic principles of leadership are more critical than the plans. He outlines 14 steps of basic principles of effective leadership 1) personal integrity; 2) execution; 3) normal time the right time for change; 4) crisis time and the call for different style of leadership, one that is authoritative; 5) leader's ultimate goal release the human potential of the followers; 6) innovation listening to the workers and giving them ample latitude to experiment; 7) mobilization leader must mobilize followers to find their hidden potential, goals, needs et cetera; 8) leadership is main differentiator in performance; 9) symbolization of leadership; 10)

communication of goals leaders must communicate his/her goals to the entire organization and not leave this up to outsiders; 11) in close proximity to the followers “a leader will always be ahead in thinking, but the group must be brought along” (p. 10); 12) create confidence among the followers and build their confidence; 13) good judgment this is innate and cannot be taught and 14) thoughtful and careful in the execution of rewards and motivation of followers.

Having listed the basic tenets of leadership, Palmer follows this by interwoven those in different context, highlights how leaders acted in certain context and pitfall of some of the leaders. Hence this places the author’s perspective even more vividly “One of the biggest mistake a leader can make is to fail to understand that what works in the leader’s own organization can be very wrong in other context that may be part of the leader’s wider responsibilities”. Palmer then painstakingly provides countless illustrations, after illustrations in different context and how leaders are effective and who the same leader became ineffective applying the same strategy in a different cultural context. Interestingly, in all the illustrations use in this book, the successful or effective leaders are those who employ different strategies for the context, paying special attention to the human element. Simply put, effective leaders are those who understand the context political, social, environmental, human relations, seizing opportunities and lastly, timing.

Throughout the book, Palmer shows how leaders either paid attention to the context and the rewards they experience because of that fact and those who fail simply because they are gods to themselves. Effective leaders blend the principles of management (organizing, coordinating, planning; forecasting and delegating) along with people’s objectives, missions, goals, dreams and aspiration. The leader in essence must ignite the follower to voluntarily act. Hence, Palmer outlines that fear and danger should not be among the ploys use by leaders to increase actions from the followers. As such he notes that communication, dialogue, collegial approach and motivation are the germane strategies that good leader employ to ignite human actions and change behaviour. Rightfully so, the issue is understanding the context including the human domain and acting in a matter that pulls people normally to your vision. He, however, notes that initially about 20% of the people will buy into your vision on the onset; 40% may coaching and 20% by in the long run and 20% will always oppose the plan. Hence, he recommends that when the oppressors have been identified, the best thing to do is to let them go – fire them from the job- or they can derail the vision of the leader. I am not sure as to why he glances at this one; but it could be because of the pain in job separation.

With the issue of seeking to implement change, having recognized detractors, he asks the question “How can leaders bring about change?” (p.6). Palmer answers this way “In part, they do it by gaining the commitment of their constituents” (p. 6), which must take into consideration the personal benefits of the followers. And sets up perfectly the statement “The leader who understand the demands of context is well-armed for the future no matter what it may bring” (Palmer, 2008, xiii). The roadmap is simple, contextual leadership and paying key attention to all elements of management and bringing these to bear on the context, with timing being everything. Who better summarizes the aforementioned issue but Palmer: If you focus on things that are very difficult to change, you may just end up causing disruption and lose momentum or cause a revolution. You can’t be too far in front of the troops. You may know what is likely to happen and what has to be done, but if you are too far ahead of the ranks you are in trouble” (p.

7), indicating that vision of the leader is good; but a good leader should allow the context to drive his vision. The discussion prolongs for some time before, Palmer seeks to distinct between management and leadership. Like an excellent leader, he allows some to come forward in the form of Larry Bossidy who says:

Yes there is. Management is the art of getting things done by using administrative skills to organize, plan, and execute. Leadership is all that, but it is also more motivational, more visionary, and it requires more in terms of personal attributes of the leader. In other words, management is administration, while leadership is vision, strategy, and motivation (in Palmer, 2008, p. 13)

Again, the issues of context, skills, competencies, and timing emerge in Bossidy's perspective and this explains why leaders are not necessarily administrators; but they are visionaries who take their followers with them to the promise point. It is even more important in periods of crisis that the leader steps forward and play his/her part unlike none other can. The author outlines that when an organization is in crisis, the leader must be bold to delegate, instruct, command, articulate the vision and take charge of the situation (p. 21), which is NOT normally his/her style outside of the crisis context top-down approach to leadership. Examples of leaders in crisis situations are 1) Rudy Giuliani, New York mayor during September 11, 2001 (p. 62); 2) James Burke, former CEO of Johnson and Johnson, Tylenol, in 1982 when 7 people died in Chicago because a Saboteur had laced the drug with cyanide (p. 63) and 3) Anne Mulcahy, President of XEROX (p. 94). He shows how those leader step forward and took charge of the situation at on the onset, and how they became effective leaders, which by extension became internationally known. However, he shares a case of the leader of Exxon Valdez, Lawrence G. Rawl chairman and CEO and how his approach to the Exxon Valdez oil spill - March 24, 1989, tanker hits a reef in Prince William Sound in Alaska, causing 11 million gallon of crude oil made him into an ineffective leader, context waited too long to address the crisis (p.73).

Clearly, there are leaders and there are leaders. Timing and context are everything, and merely waiting for a collegiate approach may destroy a leader in time of a crisis. In response to the slowness of Rawl, Palmer notes Exxon spends some \$2 billion on advertising in an effort to apologize for its tardiness (p. 74). "As the leader, remember that you are the person in charge. So you must be the one ultimately to call the shots and be personally in the situation" (Palmer, 2008, p. 76), which is why in times of crises, the leader must stand atop the mountain and declare the vision and directions. It follows, therefore, that the leader must have some guidelines for assessing a context and responding appropriately in order to establish phenomenal leadership. So, it is highly possible that the leader must be the transformational agent in organization by way of execution and motivation (p. 179) particularly in periods of crisis, which separates the effective from the ineffective leader. "John Gardner, the author of several books on leadership, believes that the ability to motivate is the leader's most important attribute" (Palmer, 2008, p. 179), suggesting that when this is NOT done, the organization will spend money on advertisement to create a positive image (p. 183). So the advertisement is to recreate the lost integrity in the leader. Palmer outlines that personal integrity is the foundation of leadership (p. 197) and therefore this offers an explanation as to why organizations will spend so much on advertisement when the leader fails to understand a context that creates mayhem.

When mayhems are created because of the inept reading of the context by the leader or there is a difficult for the leader to motivate the followers, the organization will oftentimes see a replacement of leadership. The new leader is expected to be that transformation change agent as in the case of 1) Rudy Giuliani, New York mayor during September 11, 2001 (p. 62); 2) James Burke, former CEO of Johnson and Johnson, Tylenol, in 1982 when 7 people died in Chicago because a Saboteur had laced the drug with cyanide (p. 63) and 3) Anne Mulcahy, President of XEROX (p. 94). As such, Palmer gives 9 steps or methods that a leader must use in the transformational process: 1) listen a lot to all stakeholders including employees; 2) formulate his/her own strategic plan; 3) having listened to the team, implement the strategic plan; 4) communicate constantly to employees as well as outside stakeholders; 5) align the individual's goals with the objectives of the strategic plan; 6) measure his performance against the strategic plan; 7) modify the plan, if needs be with time; 8) if you hit a crisis, communicate to the organization and 9) celebrate achievements of each milestone by way of publicly praising and rewarding people who assisted in making the strategic plan a reality (p. 88). Throughout the book, repeatedly the author uses many different illustrations of how this was done and the benefits it brings to the organizations, particularly increased performance, productivity and profitability.

In summary, *Ultimate Leadership* is a histographical biography of leadership, with emphasis on practice from the perspective of current and past CEOs and Chairmen of top organizations. The author brings the discourse of leadership into totally different area, with no reference to abstractions from theories and past empirical inquires on the matter. The book is, undoubtedly, an excerpt from the practice of leadership by leaders, with good narrations interwoven into the discourse to highlight the issues, challenges, pitfalls and decisions taken by the leadership and in retrospective whether they can wholesalely apply a one brush fits all situation in leadership of an organization. An astounding claim made by the author that is worth using her is knowing that timing is the key to effectively mastering the context for the leader, this is only learned by experience and not by training, and this perfectly contextualizes the value of this book on the practice of leadership which I hereby entitle 'The Experience in Action Unveiled for Learning'. I, therefore, recommend the good to all leaders, prospective leaders and those who want to understand the delicate balance between the value of theory and practice in leadership.

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