



Grow Up and Lead

A MANIFESTO

Lisa Rosendahl

This is a message for leaders about being brave and opening their heart.

You are being called to lead. Will you heed the call or hide from it?

Leadership is a Choice. Enter the three wise monkeys. In some parts of the world these mammals—see no evil, speak no evil, and hear no evil—reflect a golden rule and remind you to not dwell on evil thoughts. In others they reflect a lack of moral responsibility, looking the other way, or feigning ignorance.

Too many leaders opt for the latter.

It seems we can't access a news channel, check our Twitter feed, or log into Facebook without the latest fall from grace or most recent scandal front and center to greet us. Leaders are in crisis all around us.

High scorers are placed on a pedestal in the sports world, the charismatic are granted celebrity so easily in the movies, and—thanks to social media—everyone’s now an expert. We see admiration as something owed to us.

As leaders, we see deference as a reward for our hard work and greatness and we are left bewildered and questioning when others do not respond appropriately. We are left feeling that something is lacking or missing. We are left feeling that something is wrong. And we look everywhere to figure out just what that is—everywhere but to ourselves.

Let’s get a few things straight right from the start.

Leadership is not about coming to work on time, dressing professionally or having a firm handshake. Leadership is not about 200 carefully worded phrases or five shortcuts to credibility.

Leadership is not about calling people out or gloating. The moment you think, “I’ve got this” is the very same moment you’ve lost it.

Leadership is one of the hardest things you will ever do. And make no mistake about this... you are on your own.

This leadership discussion is not about correcting something that is wrong in a performance review kind of way. I walk in the shoes of a leader every day and don’t always come out on top.

It's what we as leaders choose to do when we are at the bottom that defines us.

There are leadership voids to fill in our workgroups, organizations, groups, clubs, and communities that you are perfectly positioned with interest and intent to fill. You are selling yourself and your leadership short if you are listening to that voice in your head that is telling you that you can't do this and that this call is meant for someone else.

Listen closely, this call is for you. Leadership is a choice. Sometimes you choose it; Other times, it chooses you.

Grow Up and Lead. We live leadership every day. Each morning we wake up and step into a custom designed leadership lab where we learn through our experiences. If you are a leader—or aspire to be—you've come to the right place.

Leaders are pushed by their nature to lead. I need to lead, and you do, too. You wouldn't be here if you did not. Whether it's because of something inside you that won't let you sit on the sidelines, an innate drive to serve others, a need to make a difference, a personal goal for you to achieve, or a pure and simple curiosity—you need to lead.

Nice to meet you, leader!

Does that make you anxious? Ok, be with that for a moment and then move on because we have important things to do.

Stepping outside of our comfort zone—even in shifting how we envision our role, relationships or impact—can make us antsy. I understand completely, and before you dismiss the thought, consider perhaps it's time for a change.

I started writing about leadership over six years ago. Throughout my early writing, I referred to myself as a professional. One day as I was finishing up a post, I decided to replace the word “professional” with “leader.” I hit publish, stepped away from the keyboard and waited. I am not sure what I thought would happen (people busting through my window shouting, “Liar, liar pants on fire?”) but what did happen was one thing I didn't expect. People believed me!

I declared myself a leader and people believed me. And they will believe you, too.

“You are selling yourself and your leadership short if you are listening to that voice in your head that is telling you that you can't do this and that this call is meant for someone else.”

It's time to accept that you are a leader and present yourself as a leader. I want you to describe yourself as a leader when you speak to others and declare yourself a leader when you write.

It's time to stop lurking, wondering, worrying, or worse yet, hiding

It's time to *grow up and lead*.

The Truth about Leadership. There is no avoiding the truth about leadership. Leadership is not mythical or magical. Leadership is uncomfortable and, despite the picture some self-described success stories portray, it is hard.

Leadership causes you to question everything you've known about yourself to be true. It keeps you up at night, has you second guessing your actions, replaying your conversations. The questions never end: What if they don't follow me? What if this one decision ends up being my downfall? Could this be the beginning of the end? What if I am wrong? Wait, what if I am right?

The challenges a leader faces are endless: unmotivated workers, disconnected systems, unresponsive management, and unyielding family members. They are also excuses and justifications for not trying, as are these refrains: "I sought feedback like I was supposed to but my staff members aren't doing what the book says they are supposed to be doing." "I need more training." or "I never wanted this."

You will question your decisions, the motives of others, and whether leadership is even something worth doing.

Do it anyway. Do whatever it takes to make a difference in the world.

A leader seeking glory, fulfillment of self-interests, or a way to get others to do the things their way is short sighted and will not succeed. A leader committed to inspiring, serving, and bringing out the best in others will.

You will challenge the status quo and be questioned. You will question an assumption and be challenged. You will be scrutinized, misrepresented, overlooked, conflicted, debated, and opposed. You may notice that you are working longer but not accomplishing more, fighting harder to hold your ground, finding fault with others or questioning the value of your leadership and your vision. You will take business decisions personally or blame all of your woes on another person. You will sulk. You will cry. Your fight or flight response will kick in and you will begin developing your exit (read: avoidance) strategy.

You want to walk away but that's not who you are. It's not about the squibble or the squabble. It's bigger than that. You are bigger than that.

Leadership is not something you do. It is something you are.

The Heart and Wisdom of a Leader. “I just can’t fight the feeling anymore. I’ve forgotten what I started fighting for.” That line from REO Speedwagon comes to mind every time I see a leader who wants to throw in the towel. These leaders have forgotten why they’ve chosen to lead, or somewhere along the way they’ve lost themselves in the process.

They throw in the towel.

Throwing in the towel is the easy answer. **I challenge you to nurture and protect the entrustment of leadership you were given, and to nurture and protect yourself in the process.**

I challenge you to STAY.

Nurture and protect the entrustment of leadership you were given. | We live in a world where some think that the end justifies the means: they overstate accomplishments, inflate their GPAs, or take credit for the work of others. They are mean to people, abuse their position, portray themselves as something they are not, and they toss the rules aside. It amazes me what people think they can get away with. How do they sleep at night?

As true leaders, this is not our world. This cannot be our world. We impact people’s lives. In our world, the end does not justify the means. Leadership is about trust.

“Where does trust come from? Hint: it never comes from the good times and from the easy projects. We trust people because they showed up when it wasn’t convenient, because they told the truth when it was easier to lie and because they kept a promise when they could have gotten away with breaking it. Every tough time and every pressured project is another opportunity to earn the trust of someone you care about.” —[Seth Godin](#)

Don’t let those opportunities slip by and don’t squander them.

*“You want to walk away but that’s not who you are. ...
You are bigger than that. Leadership is not something you do.
It is something you are.”*

Nurture and protect yourself in the process. | I have a vivid memory of a first sergeant I worked with as a brand new second lieutenant. We were responsible for training new soldiers as light wheeled vehicle mechanics and while the company commander was in charge, the first sergeant ran the show.

First Sergeant Lovett wasn't what you would call a "collaborative" guy. What he said went and if any of the drill sergeants, non-commissioned officers, or soldiers wanted to challenge, he would simulate shaking a dice cup, look at the rank insignia on his collar and ask, "I have three up, three down and a diamond - can you beat that?" They could not so off they went with 1SG Lovett smiling in the background.

What worked for him would not work for me and what works for me will not work for you. No two leaders lead in quite the same way.

Whether you are a first time leader or an experienced one, there is a tendency to want to "do it right." Yet despite what the thousands of books on leadership say, you cannot checklist your way to leadership. Studies have gleaned qualities and competencies common to impactful leaders, but that's where the similarities end.

How the qualities and competencies are applied in day-to-day situations is individual and unique. There isn't a prescribed right way to do leadership but there are principles successful leaders espouse. And here's the thing, the way leaders apply these principles are as varied as the leaders themselves.

People are unique. Leadership experiences are too.

Put the books, checklists, and tools aside for a moment and look inward. In order to inspire others, leaders need to be inspired themselves. If you want to bring out the best in others, you first have to know who you are and what you stand for. Leadership is personal. It is your best self.

Who are you as a leader and what do you want from your leadership? Be clear about your intentions, your unique contributions, and what effective leadership means to you.

Set aside time for reflection—alone and with a mentor, coach, or trusted advisor. Self-development is tough work. It's messy and painful, but the insights are worth it and it will move you ahead by leaps and bounds. Once you've made a leap forward, you won't be able to go backwards. You'll be compelled to make a change and the status quo will no longer be acceptable to you.

Check for alignment between who you are on and off the job. Putting a uniform on to go to work every day is one thing, having to change who you are to get the job done is another. Stepping out of a comfort zone is different than leaving your values at the door.

Working your way through a desire to step away from leadership can be much like driving in a storm; There is something for you on the other side if you take responsibility, stay with it, and keep moving forward. Above all, take care of you with rest, exercise, family, and friends.

You need your strength. We are imperfect, but we can make a difference.

What Are You Waiting For?

Don't look for approval. Nobody cares about your leadership, at first. Do this for you. Leadership is not for everyone—but it is for you. You got this far, didn't you?

Here's the thing about challenges like the one I'm posing here—and all the books, speeches, and courses about leadership. This is where we stop. We reach back into our experiences, capture words of wisdom and throw them out for you to catch and be great. We don't always tell you that worked for us may not work for you, or that what worked for you yesterday won't work for you tomorrow.

Surveys report what respondents say, competencies are proven to a degree, and experiences are very valuable. But they are not *right*. There is not a right way to lead. There is a wrong way to lead—lie, cheat, and steal, which is not real leadership—but beyond that, the field is wide open for success. And the open field is what potential leaders see as they ask, "Tell me what to do."

I can't tell you what to do. I am not you. And you wouldn't do it anyway.

People are unique. Leadership experiences are, too. You are responsible for yours. Taking responsibility for your leadership is half the challenge.

Take responsibility.

Now.

Did you feel that? That was the shift. The power of leadership has shifted in your favor. Now, restore it with heart, wisdom, and a commitment that will not be stopped. The world does not *owe* you its undivided attention, but it's willing to give it to you if you earn it.

Your leadership experience is yours alone. Don't leave it to chance.

We don't want effective leadership; We *need* extraordinary leadership.

Now, quit your sniveling. Grow up and lead. 🇺🇸

Info

ABOUT THE AUTHOR | Lisa Rosendahl is a leader in the human resource community with over 20 years of hands-on industry experience in the public, private and now, federal sector. She earned her Senior Professional in Human Resources (SPHR) designation in 1997 and is an active mentor to up and coming employees in her organization and to human resource leaders. Lisa writes about leadership at lisarosendahl.com and is co-founder/editor of womenofhr.com, a multi-contributor blog dedicated to women in human resources and business. Leadership in today's organizations require more and Lisa knows we cannot do it alone. She turns to the people in her network who continually inspire her thinking and provide her with new ideas.

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