

## CHAPTER 3

# Leadership Is an Inside Job

*“When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.”*

—Attributed to The Buddha, Lao Tzu, and the Theosophists

Leadership is an inside job. However, that inside job may be sparked or helped along by many, many outside voices.

Over the years, many great books have been written.

For example, I loved Sheldon Bowles and Ken Blanchard’s book *Gung Ho!* and Spencer Johnson, MD’s *Who Moved My Cheese?* It seemed for a while in healthcare everybody was reading *Who Moved My Cheese?* These are still excellent books.

There are also those books and authors who have been around for decades. Here, I think of authors like Peter Drucker and W. Edwards Deming. Other examples are Tom Peters and Robert H. Waterman’s book *In Search of Excellence*. Another one is Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War*. For years, that was a go-to book for most anyone in leadership in any arena.

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As an entrepreneur-in-residence at the University of West Florida, I have everybody read *The E-Myth Revisited* by Michael E. Gerber. It's a great book if you're an entrepreneur or starting a company. Certainly, Jim Collins' *Good to Great* has been one of those books that have had lasting power. I loved *Built to Last* by Collins even more than *Good to Great*, but that's my own taste.

There are books today that stay on the bestseller list year after year, like *StrengthsFinder 2.0* by Tom Rath. *StrengthsFinder* was originally introduced by Gallup in the 2001 book *Now, Discover Your Strengths*. I have huge respect for Gallup and its CEO and chairman, Jim Clifton. I often think about the number of people Gallup and its books have helped over the years. I can only hope my writings have a fraction of this kind of lasting power.

There are many, many tools and resources one can utilize to be the best they can be, and books are some of my favorite. Often it is the second or third time I read a book that it sinks in. You have to be ready to hear and receive it. I've said many times, "When the student is ready, the teacher will appear." If you will look at the top of this chapter, you'll see that this is a famous quote that has been attributed to many different individuals.

I used to say when I heard or read something, "I have never heard that before." It turns out that more often than not, I *have* heard it or read it—I just was not ready to learn it. It calls to mind another quote, this one by Samuel Johnson: "People need to be reminded more often than they need to be instructed."

This became clear when a person mentioned something in a presentation and I went up to him and said, "Wow. I loved that. Where did you learn that?" He said, "It's in this book." I said, "This is unbelievable. I have that book. Where is it in that book?" He told me it was on page 83, and I said, "You're kidding. I've never read that."

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Then I pulled the book out. I had read it, yellow-marked it, underlined it, and pink-marked it. In fact, I had read it three times and still had not remembered it. Somehow, though, based on where I was in my life and also at that moment, it suddenly made a heck of a lot of sense. So, when the student is ready, the teacher appears.

It means as a teacher and a leader, I needed to deflate my ego. It also means that I may not be the teacher, even for people who report to me. It's really hard when somebody says they've never heard something before and I know I've already told them. The lesson was to not take it personally. One cannot control where other people are in their journey of learning.

When I was administrator at Baptist Hospital in Pensacola, Florida, an author came to speak to the leadership team. He talked about how to increase employee engagement.

When he finished speaking, he received a well-earned standing ovation. I was excited they liked him so much, but was also probably a little jealous. Envy gets in the way at times; however, I am so much better now—time does that. I approached one of our leaders, a manager, and asked her how she liked it. She said, "I didn't like it; I loved it!"

I asked, "What did you love?" She said, "Well, this part. I've never heard this before." It was a tip the speaker had given on how to show them you care. I thought to myself, *Well, you have heard it before—I've said it before. In fact, I've said it at department meetings before.*

Now, being a rather immature person at the time (and probably still today), I wanted to demonstrate to her that I had said it first. So, I thought, *How can I do this? Should I bring somebody over and say, "Do you remember when I said this?"* Then it hit me. *You know what? It doesn't matter. What's important is it sunk in now!* When the student is ready, the teacher appears. (This was also a good reminder that great

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leaders care more about results being achieved than about who gets credit for those results.)

Earlier we covered how little we read and hear is new. Most of it has been said before, by someone else, somewhere. And that's okay. It's okay to say it again, your way, and put your own twist on it. Maybe your way will resonate with someone.

In fact, in many cases, it's really not the innovator who scales something. It's the imitator. I wrote an article on why we need to be grateful for the imitators. They're not copycats. We should always give credit if other people's intellectual capital is involved, of course, but often we can take an idea someone had, or a product they invented, and figure out how to increase its use and impact. Many times, this happens across industries: One industry makes a discovery, but it's another industry that figures out how to scale it or use it in a different way.

It feels good when someone take a tool or technique I introduced and makes it better. In addition, to see how others are using technology to make accessing resources to help people working in healthcare is thrilling. The goal was and still is to help patients receive better care, provide employees a better place to work, and provide physicians a better place to practice medicine.

There are an abundance of tools, techniques, and practices that we in healthcare can implement at different times, as we are always striving to get better. We will look at some of these as we go through this book. First, though, let's start off with those things that at times get in the way of achieving our desired results. When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.

In December of 1982, with that moment of clarity that a drink won't help, I became teachable. All of a sudden, things I'd been hearing finally clicked. I could go to therapy and really maximize what I

had heard or read. I learned to stop blaming the therapist or other people and circumstances in my life.

In *The Busy Leader's Handbook*, the first chapter is the key to everything that follows. It's titled "Strive to Be Self-Aware and Coachable." If a person doesn't have self-awareness, it's over. They're not going to know what they're good at, but mostly, they're not going to know what they can improve upon. There's a variety of techniques in that book on how to improve self-awareness. Once aware, we are more coachable. This means being willing to listen and implement the lessons.

Harry Gruner is founder and managing general partner of JMI Equity. I have great respect for Harry. We had breakfast one morning and I asked him, "Harry, when you look at investing in a company, how do you make the decision?"

I thought he'd say things like, "Well, can you raise prices? What's the runway?" (Meaning, what is the growth opportunity?) He told me how many companies they'd looked at to possibly invest in, which was in the hundreds; how many they'd then dug deep into, which was way, way fewer; and how many they would invest in, which was maybe two or three a year. I asked him how he made those decisions, and he said, "There are two main drivers: self-awareness and coachability of the founder."

He explained that his firm isn't investing in a company to keep it the same. They're investing in the company to grow it. If a founder is stuck on saying, "Here's how this company has to run," they might not be coachable enough to adjust to some of the recommendations that they will receive.

So, in the spirit of self-awareness and coachability, we'll spend the next several chapters walking through a presentation that I have given in the last couple of years.

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The theme of that presentation, and the next section of this book, is that leadership starts as an inside job. Sometimes progress is made not by reading that next book, or talking to that next consultant, or hearing that next lecture, or trying that newest tool. These things can help. However, real growth happens when we get rid of stuff that blocks us from maximizing the tools we already have, the leader we're already working with, the book we've already read, the consultant we've already heard.

When we get the inside right, the outside follows.