

*Throttle Up challenges traditional leadership development strategies based on traits, behaviors, charisma and positional authority with an approach based on action and practice geared towards the multifaceted real-world challenges of everyday life. Why? Because that is what leaders and their partners really do--they take action!*

# **Throttle Up:**

## **How to Accelerate the Impact Of 21st Century Leadership**

by John P. Dentico, Ed. D

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# THROTTLE UP

HOW TO  
ACCELERATE THE IMPACT  
OF 21ST CENTURY  
LEADERSHIP



**JOHN P. DENTICO, Ed. D.**

Foreword by James D. Kirkpatrick and  
Wendy Kayser Kirkpatrick

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## Preface

*A definition is the enclosing a wilderness  
of idea within a wall of words*

SAMUEL BUTLER

Except for having met and worked with some truly wonderful people, I have often thought that given a chance to live the last twenty-five years over again I would rather have started a rock band than study leadership. It remains a vexing assignment. Nevertheless, here I am writing a book about none other than 21st-century leadership. Who knew?

Why am I so vexed? It starts with the idea of leadership development becoming nothing more than a 19th-century cure-all tonic. In reality, the term leadership is the catch-all for every manner of human endeavor even though not everything people do is leadership. Why is that? Because for all the attention the term leadership attracts, its study and practice remain like a magic elixir sold from the back of a horse-drawn wagon. It is extolled as the cure for all our ills, even while its promoters gather to taste the contents of the bottle but never agree on what it contains. How could they? With over 550 different named models of leadership, at last count, the fact remains that the term leadership means different things to different people. Is there a reason for so many to lay claim to the cure? Leadership scholar John Gardner said it best. “Leadership is such a gripping subject that once it is given center stage, it draws attention away from everything else” (Gardner 1990, xvi).

In this the twentieth year of the 21st century the call for great, competent, or transformational leadership is deafening. All one needs to do is watch a local TV news program or scan the Internet. It seems every organization

from public and private institutions and companies to government agencies at all levels are working to develop leaders capable of dealing with the complex, information-rich, ever-changing world in which they find themselves. For some, it is too late as they were secretly swept away by a tsunami of change they were ill prepared to meet. For others, there is still hope provided they come to grips with the changing nature of leadership in the 21st century. The fact remains that the words leader and leadership have become more than synonymous. They are one and the same—after all, it’s the leader who gives us leadership. At least, that’s how it has been!

And therein lies the problem, one of today’s great paradoxes. In 1978, the venerable leadership author James MacGregor Burns wrote: “If we know too much about our leaders, we know far too little about leadership... We fail to grasp the essence of leadership that is relevant to the modern age and hence we cannot agree even on the standards by which to measure, recruit, and reject it” (Burns 1978, 1–2). Four decades later, the leadership debate continues with unrelenting intensity. Say the word “leadership” in a room full of people, and everyone universally understands what the word means—or do they?

Leadership: Oh yeah, you mean the ability of one person to inspire or command others to do what they want to be done. Leadership: You mean the most senior people in the organization, you know, the people in charge?

The discussions, research, and practical work surrounding this subject have led to one of the greatest conundrums of our times—what indeed constitutes this sought-after but elusive phenomenon? Even while an abundance of leadership books and articles flow from publishers and Internet sites like the plenty from a cornucopia, the phenomenon of leadership remains a much-discussed yet controversial topic.

However, despite the absence of a precise definition, leadership development programs have increased exponentially in the last fifteen years. The magic elixir is selling like hot cakes. One thing is for sure. In the new millennium, the cry for leadership has grown louder and more passionate as attested to by America’s ongoing political seasons and relentless searches for talent in industry and the public sector.

What *is* leadership? And how does one develop leadership capacity to fit

21st century needs? *Throttle Up* strives to answer these questions in a clear and up-to-date way.

### **The Ever-Present Leadership Conundrum—A Clear Definition**

Imagine you're building a house and a friend is helping you. You ask your friend to bring you a hammer, but he returns with a small jeweler's screwdriver. Amazed, you remark, "I asked for a hammer." He replies, "This *is* a hammer!"

So go the study and practice of leadership. If you ask a leadership scholar or practitioner to bring you a hammer—that is, a definition of leadership—you might find yourself buried under everything from a small jeweler's screwdriver to a bulldozer. And some wouldn't bring you anything at all. For many, leadership is indefinable; their advice—you'll know it when you see it.

During the past 100 years, numerous experts have weighed in with a description, notion, paradigm, and vague definition of leadership. For example, in 1978, Burns cited a recent study where 130 definitions of leadership turned up (Burns 1978, 2). In 1985 this number exploded when leadership scholars Warren Bennis and Bert Nanus estimated that over 350 definitions of leadership existed (Bennis and Nanus 1985, 4); in 1993, Dr. Joseph Rost actually performed a count. He surveyed over 587 books and articles to find no fewer than 221 different definitions of leadership (Rost 1993, 44). More recently, Dr. Richard Webster, Principal-PRM Institute, Director of the Hitt Leadership Models and Qualities Project, and retired adjunct professor at The Ohio State University, has spent the last sixteen years gathering models and definitions of leadership. His number is over 550 named models many of which share over 100 similar qualities (Webster 2019).

Former MIT Sloan School Professor and a luminary in the field of organizational development Ed Schein says it this way: "Similarly we have to define leadership because there are now so many definitions running around both in the academic and applied literature, there are so many prescriptions of what a leader should be in terms of basic competencies and what a leader should do in terms of increasing the effectiveness of organizations, that the students and practitioner can't possibly figure out what to believe and what to ignore" (Schein 2010, 1). As I said, it remains a vexing assignment.

While leadership scholars and practitioners conduct a meta-leadership debate, the image of Emperor Nero who fretted while Rome burned comes to mind. Frankly, this debate, fueled by the notion that leadership development and human development are one in the same, approaches a form of insanity—that is, doing the same things over again yet hoping for a different outcome. It's time to stop this insanity.

The good news is that something is happening, something that represents a sea change in how we think about the nature and meaning of leadership. A separation is occurring between the idea of being a leader and the action of leadership practice. Said differently, there's a difference between *being* a leader and *doing* leadership. As Professor Joseph Raelin, the Knowles Chair of Practice-Oriented Education at Northeastern University and also the Principal at the Leaderful Consultancy wrote: "Its essence is the conception of leadership as occurring as a practice rather than residing in the traits or behaviors of particular individuals" (Raelin 2016, 1).

It is an accepted norm that while people may occupy a position and have the knowledge or even skills associated with that job the ability to convert that knowledge into practice and intended action requires an individual to possess know how. A person needs to know how to put leadership into action. It is a standard applied to every other discipline, field of study, or human endeavor except leadership development.

More important, it's no longer sufficient to think about leadership education and training as the key to development but as the goal of organizational impact. To that end, this book seeks to answer the question, "Does your leadership education or training program truly accelerate the impact on the organization?" Of course, how can we accelerate anything if we can't define, describe, or contrast it against other competing ideas? Moreover, the context within which the practice of leadership occurs plays a vital role in understanding the how and why of its evolving nature. What worked for yesteryear may be incongruent with today's demands.

To that end, we need a new class of practice-focused leaders for the 21st century. The time has come to lift the fog from the field of leadership, because the idea that "you'll know it when you see it" helps no one. How can we begin

to prescribe the right cure for the dearth of leadership when the remedy and the ailment are mismatched? If you've ever received the wrong treatment for an illness due to a misdiagnosis, you know it's not pleasant or productive. Similarly, this new class of leaders requires something more substantial than ever—something they can wrap their arms around so they can step boldly into the future. The cost of not doing so is THE FUTURE!

### **The Benefits of the *Throttle Up* Approach**

It is my fondest hope that *Throttle Up* will help people live productive, profitable, and meaningful lives where their actions make a difference to them and those around them. For this reason, a substantial part of the subject matter is directed towards the estimated eighty percent of people who, for one reason or another, feel leadership is someone else's responsibility. *Throttle Up* encourages people who want or need to make a difference through leadership, but have never thought they could be leaders, to become agents of transforming change in their organization and community.

However, the fact remains that leadership can be anything one says it is—until a person or group has to do something complex with it. Therefore, the purpose of this book is to help people and organizations bring clarity to both the definition and practice of leadership in the 21st century. Moreover, it is my conviction that action and practice are the pathways to real personal transformation because our life experiences and the things we do give rise to who we indeed become.

To achieve the purpose of this book, *Throttle Up* merges six major topics with seven how to processes. The major topics include: leadership development vs leadership impact, strategic thinking vs strategic planning, culture change, blended learning vs pull learning strategies, the use of interpersonal simulations to accelerate the impact of leadership education and strategies for the evaluation of learning programs. The seven how to processes explained in *Throttle Up* are action oriented 21st-century leadership practices and include:

- How to complete a strategic thinking session
- How to initiate and establish a leadership network
- How to create storybooks to accelerate a culture shift

- How to use the four frames to create compelling communications to support a culture shift (Wax-On, Wax-Off)
- What five questions to ask when selecting a 21st-century leadership impact program
- How to apply the LeadSimm® leadership impact simulation method
- How to create and implement a pull learning education and evaluation strategy that works to assess the impact on the organization

Additionally, chapter 11 provides a future look at two realistically contrived hypothetical organizations; one privately held IT organization and the other a law enforcement training institution in order to demonstrate the use of the concepts and processes described in *Throttle Up* to the complex issues facing them.

When Albert Einstein was asked how he derived his theory of relativity, he replied that at age 16 he imagined himself traveling through the universe riding on a moonbeam. For Einstein, imagination is the most powerful force on earth. In keeping with this notion, it is important to remember that accepting the principles and practices discussed in *Throttle Up* does not require a leap of faith. It requires something more; it requires a leap of imagination. In the world of leadership, you have a multitude of choices. My counsel to you is to choose wisely! Read on.

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# Chapter One: Leadership Development— Going Nowhere Fast!

*If you don't know where you are going, you might  
wind up someplace you don't want to be*

YOGI BERRA

Borrowing the late great catcher's play on words, I would offer that if you don't know what you are doing, you might wind up doing something you don't want to do. For me, this idiom underscores the plight of the majority of leadership development efforts across any number of industries as they currently exist.

Consider this. Every three years or so, Development Dimensions International (DDI), an international leadership consultancy, completes a global leadership forecast. On average, DDI surveys more than 12,000 human resources professionals and international leaders from more than 70 countries.

In 2008/2009, DDI's findings revealed that leadership development was going nowhere fast—even though 75% of executives surveyed identified improving leadership talent as a top business priority (Howard and Wellins 2009, 4). Then in 2011, DDI's findings revealed, “despite the billions spent on an array of talent management initiatives, organizations have not shown much progress” (Boatman and Wellins 2011, 11). In 2014/2015, DDI reiterated what it has found in the last two surveys, boldly stated in its leadership outlook *GOING NOWHERE FAST* (Development Dimensions International 2015, 12). More important, DDI's *State of Leadership Development: Time to Act is Now*, highlighted two validated long-standing standard practices influ-

encing organizations' ability to transform leadership development. Those two practices include:

- Definition of leadership requirements before designing development solutions
- Clarity of practices that yield the most effective leadership development (Lowe 2015, 8)

In its most recent 2018 forecast, which included surveying 25,812 leaders, 2,547 HR Professionals, and 2,488 organizations, DDI reiterates the plight of leadership development efforts in the business world today. DDI's findings are grim. "Even after spending more than \$50 billion annually on developing their leaders, many companies still don't have the bench strength to meet their future business goals... Leadership models and development programs abound; few tie to business goals (impact-my words). Worse yet, there's scant evidence that they actually work. What is needed is a coherent, integrated leadership strategy" (Development Dimensions International 2018, 8).

Strategy demands that organizations have a clear picture of what it is they are trying to do. Without a coherent strategy, organizations in both the private and public domains implement tactical leadership development remedies without an understanding of what leadership learning efforts comprise a value added proposition to their overall mission. The problem with this way of thinking is that "tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat," a wisdom attributed to the great Chinese strategist Sun Tzu.

But what does all this mean? It means that despite the billions of dollars spent on talent management initiatives, behavioral screening, performance measurement equations, and metrics, the return on these investments indicates little if any bang for the buck. How can this be? Where are the leaders? Where is the leadership?

Perhaps the answers are found in a scene from the movie *Indiana Jones and The Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Spielberg et al. 1981). As Indy and Sallah learned when searching for the Well of the Souls to find the Ark of the Covenant, make sure you're digging in the right place! Yet organizations continue to dig in the same place but at a frenzied pace. That place is marked by an



industrial perspective of leadership portrayed as individual traits focused on behavioral or charismatic acumen owned by the designated leaders at different levels of the organization. In this factory mindset, whatever the leader does is leadership. It implies that all workers have to do is follow the leader's orders and better leadership results! I find this strategy troubling and apparently it is not working. But this is the exact perspective that DDI uses in its surveys. As noted in the survey's report: "For our survey, a leader was defined as someone who manages the performance or responsibilities of other individuals in an organization" (Howard and Wellins 2009, 7) (Boatman and Wellins 2011, 6). That's interesting. The terms leader and manager are used interchangeably in this DDI definition (more on this later).

DDI's surveys work to assess the bench strength of organizations to meet their future positional (leader or manager) demands. It achieves this by performing a multilevel and multidiscipline survey of people in organizations including those managed by leaders in charge. The fact is that the DDI reports do a superlative job in characterizing the issues, challenges, environments, learning demands, and complexities facing 21st-century leaders. However, it leaves the definition or model of leadership in force up to each respective organization and instead laments their progress in developing better leadership capacity.

From where I sit, we have long passed the notion that leadership practice is about position. While their survey efforts represent a noble and worthwhile investment, I find them to be confusing since it underscores the definitional dilemma that grips leadership education programs as they so aptly point out.

As it stands right now DDI surveys the opinions of people in organizations instead of the impact of a value added 21st century leadership model on the organization's effectiveness in its respective industry. I cannot help but think that DDI is missing an opportunity to help organizations create greater synergy between leadership models and practice with the demands and realities of 21st-century organizations. What is required is a commitment to a value added practice based 21st-century leadership model as the basis for their consulting work. A model that closes the gap between the findings of their reports and the need for greater leadership capacity in 21st-century organi-

zations. But is this a reasonable request? I am confident it is. Of course, the question is how to begin the process of establishing a 21st-century model of leadership that makes sense for modern day organizations. Perhaps the best advice is to begin at the beginning.

As I see it the beginning requires establishing a clear baseline to set a modern-day perspective on leadership. I begin this process by offering five truisms I've come to know after more than fifty years studying and practicing leadership and management. When taken together, these truisms offer a prism through which the nature and intent of leadership can be clarified. In fact, they may help any interested group wade through the tons of leadership information to find ideas that make sense in your own 21st-century leadership training and education efforts.

### **The Five Truisms of Leadership**

Question: Is there a common foundation upon which the notions of leadership take shape? Asked another way, if we were to drill down into the theories, models, and notions of leadership, is it possible to find true common denominators that make sense? Here are my five.

**Truism 1: If one has no followers, it's difficult to regard that person as a leader.**

This truism was pointed out by the Moses of management, Peter Drucker, who said that the only common thing about leaders is that they all have followers (Beckhard, Goldsmith, and Hesselbein 1996, xii).

Paradoxically, most of the scholarly work done in leadership development considers the leader the sole active member of a leadership dynamic. The industrial model of leadership pervading organizational frameworks since the early 1900s features a common theme—that is, for organizational success, we find and harvest great men and women, get them into the highest positions, and ensure their subordinates follow their instructions. This idea is the essence of the leadership as position concept. Said another way, leadership are the people in charge.

In this regard, leadership is allied with terms such as strength, direction, command and control, charismatic presence and acumen and adroit behav-

ior. The focus of traditional leadership development efforts has been to create, develop and instill these traits and behaviors in people by making them better humans. Bookstores today are lined with leadership books profiling people who have reached some apparent, yet indefinable, level of spiritual greatness or transcendental awareness. This perspective implies these leaders changed the course of organizational events single-handedly.

It also implies that leadership is about being rather than doing—that both leadership development and human development are the same. Yet this notion is confusing. If leadership development is about human improvement, then what is distinctive about human development? Conversely, if human development is only about leadership development, then when will these leaders be ready to do leadership? Will it be when they have discovered the meaning of life? Something is wrong with this perspective, yet it prevails.

**Truism 2: In the 20th century, leadership was an elitist philosophy.**

“The leadership approach tends often unconsciously to be elitist; it projects heroic figures against the shadowy background of drab, powerless masses” (Burns 1978, 3). By saying this, Burns noted the split between the literature on leadership and the literature on followership.

This elitist philosophy creates a subtle and insidious message. That only people who occupy positions of authority are THE leaders who by right bestow leadership on others who merely follow. The leaders own leadership. This perspective denies access to leadership by the ordinary person. Messages in publications continue to revere the great man or woman whose actions alone will save us. For example, Burn’s quote noted above portrays heroic figures on the background of drab and powerless people. Terry’s *Authentic Leadership: Courage in Action* notes that Kouses and Posner’s Leadership Challenge shows that all the people studied in the book were heads of organizations or divisions (people in charge) (Terry 1993, 26). Too often leadership development stands on the notion of leaders who emanate some sort of a blinding light wherever they go. The idea assumes that, before one can be a leader, they must reach a high level of personal enlightenment. Often, this idea is captured in the phrase that people need to be able to lead themselves before they can lead others. But what does this mean? A person has to reach some

point of human development so far above their co-workers and contemporaries that followers blindly comply with their wishes? This seems farfetched considering that organizations, both public and private, must deal with the complexities of their everyday existence with the team on the field. How long can any organization wait before a person is enlightened enough to engage in leadership? And who even knows what this state of perfect leadership consciousness looks like?

Still, much of the discussion remains focused on the leader only, not the leaders and followers collaborating. I refer to this collaboration as the leadership dynamic—and it leads to the next immutable truism.

**Truism 3: Leadership is concerned with mobilizing people to achieve something difficult or even transforming.**

The work of leadership is difficult; if it were easy, we wouldn't need thousands of leadership books and articles to change the status quo. Contemporary leadership scholars and practitioners agree that leadership isn't defined as a codified set of traits, a preprogrammed change of behavior to meet any situation (leader as chameleon), a simple transaction, or a level of charisma, greatness, or excellence. This is especially true considering those who follow—previously known as powerless masses—are now knowledge workers, not 19th-century factory workers. Have you taken a look at a modern-day factory? It is replete with computers and technology run by a force of knowledge workers.

In truth, organizations are continually transforming as they renew, re-engineer, and refocus their efforts to develop better products and services. It is a necessary course of action in a society whose organizations are mired in rapidly changing complex challenges that require a myriad of talents applied creatively. The level of complexity alone provides evidence that tackling these 21st-century tasks with industrial-era leadership models is much like driving a car at eighty miles an hour while staring in the rear view mirror.

However, this frivolous practice continues. Despite today's knowledge-driven society, the lion's share of work in leadership development still calls for distilling the personal qualities of great leaders into discernible talents that can be replicated or taught to others. Those in leadership development have tried

every conceivable way to replicate these abilities, but they remain as elusive as ever. And this brings us to the next truism of leadership.

**Truism 4: A leadership theory or model can be anything anyone says it is until one has to take action based on that idea.**

Real world challenges that demand action collapses any ambiguities about the nature of leadership. Why? Because change is the focus of the leadership efforts. And it's not only small changes but big transformations that are needed.

It's time to accept that complexity is the foundation of 21st-century life and overlay onto it new notions of leadership. That means asking how the practice of leadership can connect to issues such as:

- Preparing for natural and people-made emergencies
- Preventing or mitigating terrorism and school violence
- Restoring trust and integrity among the public and its police department after officer-involved shootings
- Dealing with culture shock when two private firms merge
- Fostering the ability of a company to out-create rather than compete against firms in its industry

To my way of thinking, notions of leadership incongruent with the complexity of the 21st-century world will dry up and crumble when applied to the realities of life in motion. For example, take the intractable problem of school violence. Who is the one leader who can dictate viable solutions to the diverse group of stakeholders responsible for those dealing with such chaotic, cataclysmic events? Who has the one true solution to keeping kids and others so motivated from killing kids? No one leader.

Without social capital (trust, honesty, integrity, openness, truth) from all stakeholders (police, school administrators, teachers, students, parents, union officials, psychologists, safety personnel, and more), meaningful dialogue and congruent action is impossible. There will be no set of procedures, protocols, and people proactively working to prevent or ready to spring into action when a terrible event of this sort occurs. In essence, there will be no leadership dynamic at work.

**Truism 5: True motivation is an intrinsic need for meaning and purpose.**

Motivation is the true pivot point, the center of gravity around which the theories, models, and practices of leadership revolve. To that end, leadership is taken up with motivating people (through one means or another) to get them to do what the leader wants and needs them to do. Notions about leadership run the gamut from charismatic to authoritarian, from time management to laissez faire, from money and perks to self-organized teams, from stimulus to its expected response, and from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation—all with the focus on inspiring people to do something for the leader, the organization, and in the end, for themselves. But do these methods mask the true essence of motivation? Is motivation a set of extrinsic incentives designed to engage people to work harder? From where I sit, true motivation is not an externally applied set of stimuli.

Instead, motivation is an intrinsically derived sense of connection and purpose within an individual to take up a cause to make a difference. Said differently, what does it take for someone *to be* motivated to take action? The idea of individuals becoming internally committed and driven by the mission at hand is a key theme of *Throttle Up*.

If leadership is intrinsically connected with people then what truly motivates people to rise each morning and meet the challenges of the day? Is there something more than just a paycheck for a fair day's work? Perhaps the clearly visible habits and actions of younger generations can help us reveal the powerful motivators for all—meaning and purpose. After all, do we believe we can lead the younger generations with the leadership ideas of a bygone era? Something is wrong with this idea.

### **The New Generations**

Get used to it, change is afoot as the new class of leaders coming from Generation X, the Millennials, and Generation Y levy their influence and take the reins of organizations. Consider how former CEO and now Harvard Professor Bill George described workers from the millennial generation (born between 1977 and 1994). “Their approach to leadership is entirely different... They don't care about position, power or status or organizational hierarchy, or even

having followers. Instead, they are superb networkers who find collaborators to create opportunities and businesses. They are online 24/7 always networking; always in touch... The emerging leaders are knowledge workers who typically know more than their bosses. They collaborate with people who have skills they don't, growing up with diversity as the norm, they understand the benefits of a diverse people" (George 2007).

Bill George's words convey the essence of this new class of 21st century practice-focused leaders as they boldly step toward greater liberty and self-expression. Their needs and desires meld the classic ideas of Douglas MacGregor's Theory Y (McGregor 1960) and Frederick Herzberg's motivator-hygiene theory (Herzberg 2008) into one in which ambition, self-motivation, and self-control meshes with achievement, responsibility, growth, and advancement. More important, no organizational entity bestows these attributes on the younger generations because they already hold them in the palm of their hands. They strive to be masters of their fate.

But there is fallout from the clash of 21st century needs and the desires of these rising generations due to the entrenched industrial perspectives of organizational life remaining today. This clash brings an inherent conflict to the political, cultural, and social structures of society. Sociologist Daniel Bell foresaw this in his epic work *The Coming of the Postindustrial Society* (1999). Bell described the tension between individuals who seek greater liberty and self-expression pitted against the tenets of bureaucracy and its rationalization of all life in modern society. He wrote: "In the last one hundred and fifty years, the social tensions of Western Society have been framed by these contradictory impulses toward equality and bureaucracy, as they have worked themselves out in the politics and social structure of industrial society. Looking ahead to the next decades, one sees that the desire for greater participation in the decision making of organizations that control individual lives (schools, hospitals, business firms) and the increasing technical requirements of knowledge (professionalism, meritocracy) form the axis of social conflict in the future" (Bell 1999, 8).

Each successive generation pushes the envelope for more liberty and equality as it deliberately moves away from rational order. And this did not start with the Millennials. Remember the protests against the Vietnam War

and the free love experiments of the 1960s? Yes, the Baby Boomer generation also demonstrated a desire to move toward a greater sense of liberty and autonomy. And move they did! The residue of these movements gave rise to an inherent need to question authority on a continual basis and remains with us today becoming part of the fabric of society. The implication of this state of mind drives younger generations to strive for greater expression including a say in what they do and how they do it.

### **Demand for Congruence**

Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Y's implication for leadership in the 21st century is clear. The days of drab and powerless followers are over. The work of these new classes of leaders is to create an understanding that the needs, goals, and values of both the individual and the organization can and should be congruent. They're devoted to bringing a high level of congruent action into the organizations they lead. But to do that requires shifting the concept of leadership from seeking solutions with a single active voice to one in which many voices comprise a whole that's greater than the sum of the parts. More than that, this shift is marked less by a need of being a great leader to that of doing great things. It is a fulfillment of the adage that there are no great people—just ordinary people called on to do extraordinary things.

But there's more to this story than meets the eye—something deeper and more meaningful. The power of the Internet provides an important clue about exactly what that is.

### **Meaning—The Essence of Human Endeavor**

Have you ever wondered why such Internet sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have become all the rage? Is this a sporting competition in which the number and quality of social media posts raises the level of one's social status among followers? Why do billions of people feel bound to catalog their daily events for the world to see? Do I really care if a friend just had the best chicken salad sandwich ever? Not really. I don't even care to think about it!



Sure, we hear words such as keeping in touch and creating social connections, but it appears the more connected people become through social media, the more alienated they actually feel. Experts, speakers, and researchers weigh in on why the up and coming generations require this type of connection. Often, they present their ideas with a “this is the way it is” perspective without explaining why this phenomenon exists. So what’s really going on?

I think it has more to do with extracting some level of meaning out of the smallest activity—that is, it’s the experience of life that gives us meaning. Psychotherapist, neurologist, Nazi concentration camp survivor and founder of the third Viennese school of psychotherapy known as logotherapy (a meaning centered psychotherapy) Viktor Frankl wrote his seminal work *Man’s Search for Meaning* in 1959 to provide insight into the nature of meaning. Specifically, he described the three ways humans derive meaning.

First, “create a work or do a deed” (Frankl 1985, 115) (e.g., climb a mountain, write a book, develop a career, save a life). “Second, experience something or encounter someone” (Ibid, 115), that is, meaning can be found not only in work but also in love. The relationships we nurture and keep with family and friends make meaning every day. Third, “by the attitude we take towards unavoidable suffering” (Ibid, 115). Faced with a hopeless situation and an unchangeable fate a person may rise above themselves, may grow beyond themselves, and by so doing change themselves. To that end, people may suffer nobly and make the best of a bad situation.

As one who survived the concentration camp, Frankl was intimately familiar with suffering. To explain why some men succeeded in surviving its horrors, Frankl wrote: “We had to learn ourselves and, furthermore, we had to teach the despairing men that it did not really matter what we expected from life, but rather what life expected from us. We needed to stop asking about the meaning of life, and instead to think of ourselves as those who were being questioned by life—daily and hourly. Our answer must consist, not in talk and meditation, but in right action and in right conduct. Life ultimately means taking the responsibility to find the right answer to its problems and to fulfill the tasks, which it constantly sets for each individual” (Frankl 1985, 85).

When interviewed in 1987 for the very popular miniseries, *The Power of Myth*, the famous mythology scholar Joseph Campbell reiterated Frankl's assertion. When asked if we are searching for the meaning of life, Campbell replied this way: "People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances with our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive" (Campbell 1988, 3).

Meaning and purpose have emerged as powerful drivers for human endeavor that belong to everyone, not just the leader or person in charge. Yet too often organizations anesthetize or rob their people from extracting any meaning from their activities either through micromanagement or placing them in an untenable position between keeping their jobs or doing their jobs. How many people from all walks of life engaged in work today are more motivated by keeping their jobs rather than doing their jobs?

Keeping one's job is understandable as the greater majority of people are trying to do their best with bills to pay, mortgages, car loans, school expenses, soccer fees, ballet classes, Saturday night out to name a few. This is the reality of life as most people know it. However (and this is a personal decision that can only be made by each individual), sometimes one has to choose between keeping one's job and losing one's soul. And it is this choice that calls on a prospective leader's true motivation to make a difference.

Simply put, what distinguishes a leader from everyone else is the desire or drive to make a difference. As my friend and colleague Dr. Stuart Weinstein likes to say, no one really cares if you think outside the box. What gets people to be defensive is when you act outside of the box. It's the acting, not the thinking that often brings about the equal and opposite reaction.

### **Meaning=Doing=Practice**

Our contemporary knowledge-based society has taken on a pragmatic notion to its meaning. Every day, people come to work wanting to do something meaningful as they search for the experience of being alive. For them, leadership lives in action, not in contemplation or in being a perfect leader. They

work together to meet common challenges as they seek answers to life's intractable problems.

In a world filled with rapid and complex change, ambiguity and turbulence, diverse perspectives and information overload, people want intrinsic satisfaction from the work they do. Knowledge creation and re-creation are the prime movers as committed groups of people apply their diverse talents to the issues at hand. For them, competition, while preeminent in everyday life, is no longer good enough as they work to out create their industry rivals leaping up and over them. In that regard, they strive to bring order and stability to their hyper-dynamic and even chaotic world by treating turbulence as opportunity.

For those who believe that leadership is about being, let this be a final counter: If meaning in life relates to the experience of being alive and (as Frankl wrote) finding the right answers to its problems and right action, then leadership is about doing. *In the 21st century, leadership is what people do together.* How do we accelerate that in ways that bring congruent and meaningful results? *Throttle Up* offers answers that can accomplish both of these.

## **Summary**

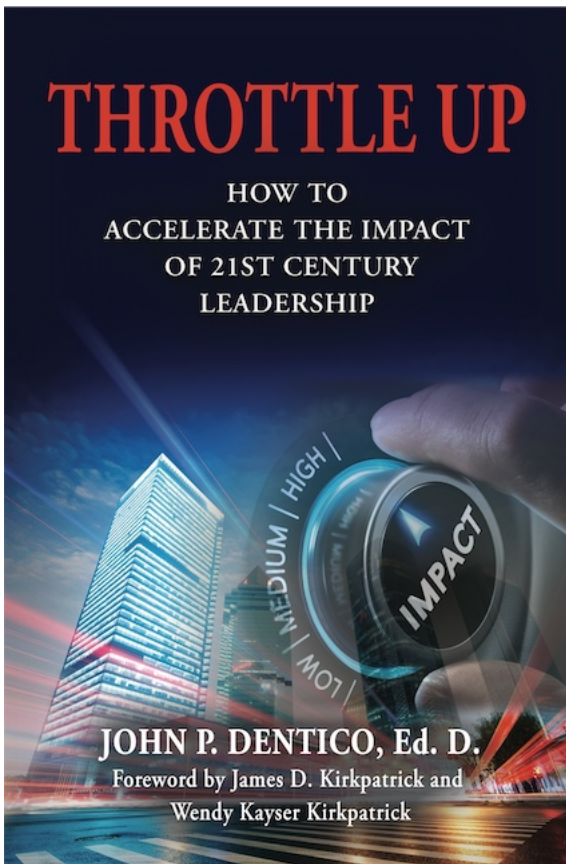
According to the last five forecasts and reports from DDI, developing leaders in the 21st century has seen little or no progress, yet the beat goes on. Enamored with the focus on the leader only, the pervading development programs emphasize that leadership is more about being than doing because the terms leader and leadership are interchangeable. Organizations turn to yesterday's solutions to develop not only potential leaders but also leadership capacity in organizations. To that end, chapter one is a wakeup call. It calls into question the age-old perspectives of leadership and their incongruent fit with the challenges posed by the complexities of 21st-century life in any organization. It provides five truisms that create a common foundation upon which leadership can be better understood.

Additionally, this chapter discusses the reasoning for the clash between the demands of 21st-century life and the aspirations of the rising generations in contrast with the industrial models that continue to rule the day. To that end, it calls for congruence between the complex demands of the 21st century and

leadership models that support this change event. It underscores the essence of human endeavor—that is, the need to experience life and extract meaning from the things people do. Based on this, it proposes this revolutionary idea: *Leadership is what people do together in the context of a leadership dynamic.*

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*Throttle Up challenges traditional leadership development strategies based on traits, behaviors, charisma and positional authority with an approach based on action and practice geared towards the multifaceted real-world challenges of everyday life. Why? Because that is what leaders and their partners really do--they take action!*

# **Throttle Up:**

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