*Ethics, Reason, & Excellence: A Simple Formula for Leadership (Revised and Extended Second Edition) distills these three leadership principles into fluid and easy to understand language in short chapters that get right to the point.*

**Ethics, Reason, & Excellence:**
**A Simple Formula for Leadership - Revised and Extended Second Edition**
By Kevin Unruh

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# ETHICS, REASON, & EXCELLENCE

*A Simple Formula for Leadership*

## REVISED AND EXTENDED
## SECOND EDITION

# KEVIN UNRUH

# Contents

# Chapter 3
## *Craftsmanship*

Leadership, just like any other job, requires a few basics in order for the leader to be successful. I will discuss the traits of a good leader soon, but first I want to talk about the essentials, which are even more fundamental than the baseline personalities and behaviors that tend to constitute good leaders.

First and foremost, a leader must be dedicated to the *craft of leadership*. I cannot over-emphasize the importance of this particular philosophy. The entirety of this book depends on this premise: that commitment and dedication to the role of leader are paramount to leadership success.

We all know craftsmen that bring credit to their chosen field. Who among us hasn't bragged on a roofer, plumber, tailor, woodworker, landscaper, welder, painter, or some other highly skilled craftsman as "the best in town"? All of us expect people who practice a trade or a craft to be the best. And, if they're not, we don't hire their services, and we never recommend them to our friends. Yet, as far as I have observed over the years, the concept of "craftsmanship" in the realm of leadership isn't very common at all. In fact, it's downright rare.

People all over the country are put in charge and asked to lead, who, very often too late, are realized by the company and/or employees to be poor leaders, but who, for any number of greater or lesser reasons, are allowed to remain in their positions. Do we not all know of at least ten examples of this phenomenon over the course of our employment histories? So, why is it that we don't treat leadership as a craft in the same way we expect it in other professions? I believe the reasons are many, but

for now – and I will get back to this analysis soon – the point is that we don't. And that's not good.

To be a leader, a true and excellent leader, a person must be as dedicated to his job as a boot maker or a glass blower, for example, is to his.

[Before I go any further, I want to take a moment to say that my use of "he" and "his" is intended as the original gender-neutral convention and as a simple courtesy to the reader. Yes, I could write "her," "his/her" and "s/he" and "they" when referring to managers and leaders, but the fact is, it is much practical and *easier for the reader* to read a "he" than it is to read the other more cumbersome options, if one is willing to accept that the use of this pronoun is nothing more than exactly what I have stated it is. My use of "he" is not a social statement, and there is no agenda or implication in my use of "he" or "his." It is a pronoun without insinuation. I assure you I have known other non-male leaders. I am simply avoiding the clunkiness of writing "he/she/they" at every turn. I repeat: This is *not* a political statement.] I continue…

Like the boot maker and the glass blower, a leader has dozens of different tasks he must perform daily in order to succeed in his craft. And, though the traditional craftsman works with a variety of materials and tools to perfect the object of his craft, a leader of people should be no less detailed and perfectionistic in attempting to guide his people to accomplish the mission of the day. Of course, I realize that the two jobs – craftsman and leader – are fundamentally different, but what I will not concede is that the two jobs are different philosophically. The same ideals, convictions, and attentions that make a premier boot maker also make an excellent leader. Until we start recruiting for and expecting from our leaders the same standards we expect from professional craftsmen, it is safe to say that the crop of good and effective leaders won't be any more bountiful than it is today.

But, sadly, at present, many of the so-called leaders filling the ranks of our companies are little more than supervisors or overseers, and some are barely more than babysitters. But, somehow, we, as a society, have become content with this. Or, perhaps it is more accurate to say that we have simply become resigned to the fact that leaders are just hard to come by, that the pool of good contenders is just too shallow to produce meaningful numbers, and so we are forced to make do with what we have been given. How complacent; how defeatist; how tragic. My assertion, you have probably guessed, is that there must be a real change in our employment culture, a true *transformation*, in order for us to begin developing the leaders we need. This book is an attempt to start this revolution. Yes, I said *revolution*, and I'm not embarrassed that I did. I truly want to help make the world better for every employer and for every employee. My daydream is that this little book will light the fuse.

The average "leader" tends to get easily derailed from performing the functions of his job. Lack of preparation, lack of know-how, lack of focus, commitment, and dedication are all pitfalls of the average employee placed in charge. The boot maker and the glass blower cannot afford to be preoccupied with or impeded by such things, lest these things be allowed to corrupt the quality of their workmanship and, in time, doom their professional reputations. If leaders were treated as craftsmen, expected to behave as craftsmen, and if leaders comported themselves as if they were craftsmen, "leaders" would truly be leaders, and the quotations marks could be removed.

*Excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have those because we have acted rightly. We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then, is not an act but a habit.*[1]

– Aristotle

A leader is someone charged with leading and guiding other people in order to accomplish a mission, and that, to many, sounds like a very difficult job. My ongoing assertion, however, is that it is not particularly difficult if one is willing to take on the job with the same attitude as the person who chooses to make his craft his profession. If one has a sincere interest in the job, an aptitude (or a genuine willingness to learn), and the dedication to perfect the role as if it were a craft, the job is relatively easy to do well. *If.*

As I started to "hold forth" earlier, we spend a third of our lives sleeping, a third living life, and a third at work. How we feel about our bosses at work seeps into the other two portions of our lives, which makes a discussion of leadership about as relevant and urgent a topic as I can think of. As most all of us are either employer or employee, the condition of leadership at our place of work affects pretty much everyone, and that condition can be good, bad, or just so-so. Whatever the case, leadership is responsible for how we feel about life for no less than eight hours a day and often quite a bit more than that. That's a big deal. And because leadership is clearly one of the most significant social constructs bearing on the human condition, I feel compelled to attempt to bring about a change in the way leadership is viewed – which I absolutely believe can be done, if you, the readers, will simply analyze this offering, and, assuming agreement, do what you can to spread these philosophies, that is, discuss and model them, until there is a sea change (coming from the landlocked state of Oklahoma, I have absolutely no experience in maritime matters; however, I just couldn't bring myself to use "paradigm shift" instead) in what it means to be a "boss."

Some of you may ask, "Is this not a rather lofty goal?" Not to me it isn't. Any such goal justified and warranted by virtue of being commensurate with the needs of the average employer and especially the average *employee,* who depends on good leadership for sustaining his

daily mental health and his financial well-being, seems perfectly pragmatic. Ambitious? OK, but "lofty"? No, I don't believe so.

Indeed, the benefits of good leadership are many and weighty, so endeavoring to propose a purportedly culture-changing formula, while perhaps presumptuous, is, nonetheless, long past due. And with that, I present the most important part of the foundation: *commitment* to treating the role as a craft. Once an individual has the commitment and the dedication required to be a good leader, all that is left is the method, which can be synopsized in three words: *Ethics, Reason,* and *Excellence.* These, I am truly convinced, comprise everything that is needed for leadership to be effective, dependable, and honorable.

Influence, persuasion, negotiation, active listening, and other elements are all concepts that are commonly discussed in the context of leadership, and all are important to the general discussion. They are. But they are nothing more than words on a page, if one is not going to focus these principles as a dutiful leader on the good of the employee and the good of the organization. I'm sure any decent book on leadership will discuss these topics to a greater or lesser degree (in fact, even this one will), but without a dedicated effort to use these to facilitate both work-life improvements and production, they are of very little value – other than to sound as if you know what you are talking about.

I have read a few books on leadership over the last 20-plus years or so, and I skimmed a few more. No, that isn't very many for someone so interested in the topic. But, that's because most generally failed in my mind to truly answer the question and to answer it simply: "How does one do it right?" The ones I did read were well-written and well-received publicly, but none of them provided the unifying theory of leadership I was hoping had already been conceptualized. I am in no way suggesting that there aren't at least a few books out there that are truly fine contributions to the discussion of leadership. Hundreds, probably thousands, have been written, and I am sure that many of them offer many

good insights, instruction, and perspectives. I am saying only that I did not find what I was looking for in them. So, after being asked in those years ago to develop the leadership presentation I mentioned, I decided to write the book I never discovered.

Inevitably, of course, there will be some of you reading this who can name a book or two that has some similarities to my philosophies and, if so, I am glad. I'm sure they are excellent and deserve reading. In developing my leadership presentation, however, I chose to base my assertions on my own philosophies and observations so that I would have the benefit of true conviction and enthusiasm as I spoke. My sincere and whole-hearted belief is that *Ethics, Reason*, and *Excellence* presents both a simple and unifying theory of leadership and, in its natural simplicity, also presents a set of ideas that are minimal in mechanics and process. Which is why this book is brief.

I did not set out to write a short book. It is brief because, as the title itself states, the formula for leadership is simple, and simple formulas should not require hundreds of pages to explain. Leonardo da Vinci said, "Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication,"[2] and I hope that philosophy is well demonstrated herein.

# Chapter 13
## *Anger and Confrontation*

A word about anger…

Yes, it is okay for leaders to get mad. No one expects you to be a robot. Besides, *righteous* indignation is a powerful force. On the other hand, temperance is also a powerful force – perhaps even more powerful. Righteous indignation may manifest itself in anger, but as we know, anger often causes fear and aversion.

Humans are emotional. When we care about things and those things go wrong, we often get upset, frustrated, and angry. That's normal – happens to the best of us. But the important thing about getting angry, as a leader, is not whether you become angry or even about how often. It is about how you choose to express it.

I always thought it was odd when someone who was clearly angry denied being so when asked if they were angry. I know there are several reasons why people do this. I'm just saying I believe it is completely disingenuous. Why not just admit what is already known?

In interacting with employees during times when I have been angry, one technique I have used is stating openly that I am angry. Doing this serves two purposes: It adds transparency to the conversation, a sense of honesty, and it effectively mitigates the negative impact of the anger by adding a measure of control to it by virtue of its being expressly acknowledged. *Saying* you are angry is somewhat less intimidating to people than simply *being* angry, and any attempt to diminish feelings of intimidation is always worthwhile. It's okay to get angry sometimes. Just don't be afraid of saying so out loud.

Many managers – I suspect most – allow negative feelings they may have towards an employee to fester long before they decide to say anything about it. And, usually, by the time they do say something, they have typically ramped up their resentment to a degree much higher than it would have been had they addressed the issue as soon as it appeared. Brooding, seething, and dwelling on a personal matter will affect every interaction you have with that employee until the matter is resolved. If you are upset with an employee who came in to work inexcusably late, sent an unprofessional e-mail, or caused trouble with another employee, for example, the wise thing to do, as we all know, is to address the matter right away. If you don't, it is only natural for your future dealings with that employee to be tainted by your frustration with that person. This habit in our work culture of putting off confrontation may be so commonplace as to seem inconsequential, but it isn't. If a manager spends eight hours a day with that employee and does not attempt to resolve the issue and his feelings about things, the employee will consciously or subconsciously tally each strained interaction with that manager, creating a negative memory and a destructive emotional record for each contact he has had with the manager, and the fact that the employee might be "in the wrong" is not very relevant to this point. Whether the employee is the cause of the manager's anger or not, it is incumbent on the manager, *as a leader*, to arrest the momentum of that anger by addressing the problem with the employee before too much ill will has had the chance to build up and impede the flow of good, honest, courteous communication.

I think of this relationship as a pipeline that is the responsibility of the leader to maintain, to keep free of sediment and debris that collects in the line between the manager and the employee when too many instances of conflict have been left unaddressed. Confrontation of unprofessional or irresponsible conduct in an employee is unpleasant for most managers. But a good leader stands watch over the channel and keeps it flowing freely, confronting any interpersonal flotsam and jetsam as it occurs, removing it immediately, rather than waiting until it is completely clogged before mounting a clean-up effort.

I've only met a few people over the years that seemed to take pleasure in confrontation (but then, they had issues…). Everyone else seems to dislike it. No *normal* person enjoys feeling angry, frustrated, ramped-up, or resentful. But, confrontation does not have to be so ugly. I'm not claiming that confronting and correcting an employee will ever be pleasant, but it needn't be so dreadful that it causes us to put it off for days, weeks, or even months, and make our head, neck, back, stomach, and face hurt. So, my guidance on confrontation has been the same for many years: *Do not delay*. The longer you wait, the angrier you will get. The angrier you get, the less articulate and focused and professional you will appear and be.

People tend to fall into three categories when it comes to this type of procrastination. The majority of people, it seems, put off dealing with personnel issues for the same reason they put off washing the dishes, mowing the lawn, or painting the house: They just don't want to do it because it's unpleasant. The second group is composed of those who are "not very good at it," believe "it won't do any good," believe if they wait long enough "it will go away," or claim that it "really isn't my style." The rest of the people put off confrontation until their anger reaches an amplitude that *impels* them to confront the situation. By this point, their frustration has all but boiled over and they feel they no longer have a choice in the matter, feeling as if they are physically driven to confrontation by the crescendo of their emotion. I know a lot of people like this. And though I do not believe that most of these people *deliberately* wait until their anger is so elevated they feel compelled to act, I do believe (because numerous people have admitted this to me) that they dread confrontation so much that their subconscious coerces them to wait until their anger potentiates their motivation enough that a conscious decision to confront the employee is no longer necessary and they simply react. And, although the mind-body reaction may reduce the *initial* anxiety one gets from anticipating the confrontation and deliberating it, I'm sure I don't need to point out that what comes of this reaction and the

corresponding delivery is usually far less cogent and professional in the manager's speech and far less well received by the employee than it would have been had the confrontation transpired in the early stages of consideration. Anger is human. It's normal. And there are times when anger is perfectly acceptable in the workplace. But, instances in which confrontation is needed are not the best circumstances under which anger should be nurtured. Anger is often expeditious in that it can get the job done quickly ("Go out to the warehouse and fix your screw up right now!"), but composure is almost always more productive. Is it more important to you to be *fast* or effective, *right* or effective, *in control* or effective? Do your best to put principles over emotion.

*Anger in its place and time may assume a kind of grace. It must have some reason in it and not last beyond a minute.*[8]

– Charles Lamb

Another technique I have found to be effective is using expressions of disappointment instead of expressions of anger. In a way, expressing disappointment is a sublimated form of anger. Anger is the outward expression, but the internal emotion that precipitates anger is often disappointment. So, instead of yelling, calmly telling an employee that you are disappointed in him may prove to be much more effective in conveying your message, and not least because anger, in whatever form it may take, is difficult for most people to listen to and embrace.

My Dad almost never yelled, but the two times in my life he told me he was disappointed in me resonated in my bones, almost literally, and here I am writing about it 30 years later. [I'm sure he was justifiably disappointed in me far more than these two times, but these were the only two times he said it out loud.] *That* is effective message delivery and, frankly, effective management. I repeat: It is okay to get angry sometimes. All I'm saying is that sometimes anger, no matter how justified, is not the best way to deliver your message or to fix the problem.

Now, let's talk about confrontation – the process itself.

There are two basic types of confrontation: impromptu confrontation and premeditated. Let's first discuss acts of confrontation that you plan in advance.

As discussed, one of the most important things you can do to improve the process of confrontation is to do it long before you get angry. The second most important thing is to use a script. You owe it to yourself, the employee, and to the company not to wing it. Confrontations are unpleasant at best. Scripts make them easier, smoother, and better. Here is a generalized script I have used successfully that can make the process easier and more effective for both parties:

1) Announce the purpose of the meeting before or as soon as it begins: *John, I asked you to this meeting in order to discuss your performance over the last 30 days.*
2) Then immediately state the outline for the meeting: *I will start by stating my concerns, I will tell you the basis of those concerns, I will give you my expectations, then I will give you the opportunity to ask questions or make comments.*
3) State your complaints briefly and clearly: *In the last 30 days, you have missed three deadlines, reported to work late and had vocal confrontations with several co-workers.*
4) Ask for the employee's response (if there is no defense, proceed to #6): *Before we go any further, is there anything else you would like to say?*
5) If there is a rebuttal, ask if there are other personnel who might be able to provide information or context that would facilitate a better understanding of the issues: *Is there information I am missing or are there people I can talk to that will help shed more light on these issues?*
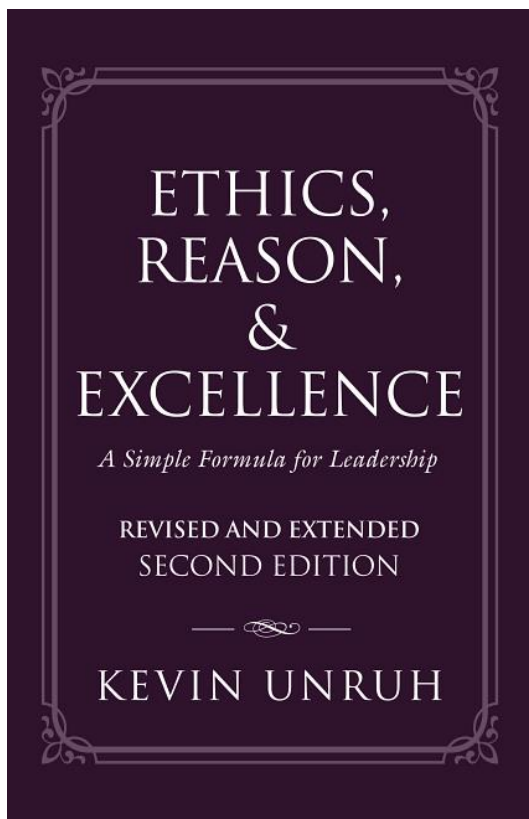6) Discuss expectations and solutions in detail

7) Discuss benefits to the employee of these solutions
8) Get "buy-in" from the employee regarding solutions
9) Monitor situation
10) Reward progress or take action

The other general category of confrontation is the unplanned or impromptu confrontation. With this type, there are a few things you can try to do (before switching over to script mode) to increase the chances that a confrontation with an employee will have a more positive than negative outcome:

1) Stay calm. Even though the situation arose suddenly, you must remind yourself to stay composed. A defensive employee is not likely to listen to what you have to say
2) Put mission over emotion – stay focused on leadership and what *good* can come from the confrontation. *You can't lead if you aren't in role*
3) Remember to announce and label your feelings (vs. simply emoting them)
4) Don't let emotion burn the bridge – you still have a job to do. Lead, even in the midst of confrontation
5) Believe in the employee's ability to salvage things. If you enter into a confrontation expecting that it will go badly, it probably will. Allow for and *expect* success
6) Explain yourself. Even when employees are being criticized or reprimanded, articulating the logic behind your statements and assertions is more effective than emotion and any opinions not thoroughly expressed
7) Stay mindful. Watch yourself. Place your words. Be self-aware. Be a leader. *Do your job.*

Confrontation is unpleasant, taxing, and is a difficult skill to master, but a leader endeavors to become proficient in this skill the same as any other.

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