

Leadership Is Overrated: How the Navy SEALs (and Successful Businesses) Create Self-Leading Teams That Win

by Kyle Buckett and Chris Mefford

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Despite millions of dollars and hours spent on leaders and their training, the problem has persisted, which is almost 80% of the workers are frustrated with or uninterested in their jobs. As claimed by the authors, *“In corporate world, we overtrain, overeducate, and overspend on leadership training- and it just isn’t working.”*

This is the motivation for the book. In other words, the reason that the authors felt obligated to write this book is *“We have to transform leadership itself.”* In this respect, the conclusion is *“The solution to workplace dissatisfaction doesn’t lie in high-functioning leaders; it lies in high-performing teams”* because it is known that people do not quit their jobs; they quit their bosses/leaders.

With this aim in mind, this book consists of 3 main chapters, which are “Define,” “Develop,” and “Sustain.” It starts with the scenario that is exercised in Navy SEAL training, which is called “killing the leader” to understand how vulnerable the team is and to show how overrated leaders are, which is alleged as follows: *“Exercise was simple. The training staff would intentionally remove the leader from whatever training they were doing as a way of simulating what might happen should he die while on mission”* (Buckett & Mefford, 2023, p. 15).

The message is simple but strong here: *“If leadership is overrated, then what comes next? In a sense, we have to kill what we’ve understood a leader to be so that another, better organizational model can emerge. It is no longer leadership that saves a company or defines a movement - it is the culture- and that’s something we all can have a hand in creating.”* Put it differently, what they seek to explain is that conventional model of leadership should be discarded and a new model or culture should be adopted for long-haul success.

This recommended culture or organizational model is “self-led team” culture where success does not lie in leaders’ performance, rather teams are the key to success. For this purpose, after they define what kind of culture it is (*Phase I*), how this culture can be developed gradually and consistently is clarified (*Phase II*). Finally, they explain how culture can be sustained. It (*Phase III*) is claimed as the phase where the real work begins because *“Having a strategy and plan to sustain the culture you create is essential for its long-term success, and such an accomplishment won’t happen on its own”* (Buckett & Mefford, 2023, p. 183).



Closing remarks of the book suggest that this new model that everyone should be part of creating makes everyone a leader and respects the role of each person and expects significant contributions. However, this does not mean that there will be no leaders or bosses anymore, “*It means we will no longer have anyone to blame for our problems but ourselves*” (Buckett & Mefford, 2023, p. 233). This is crucially significant due to the severe consequences of disengagement that have been highlighted several times in the book.

This book with full of examples and stories is worth reading because it attempts to show the problems with the conventional model of leadership and alleges to offer a more effective model. In spite of some weak and unclear examples, the authors’ attempt to challenge traditional understandings of leadership not only makes the book interesting, but also makes readers reconsider their leadership perspective.

It should be stressed, however, that while some ideas convince readers about the exaggerated/overrated value of leadership, some will surprise them about the assumption of “killing leaders” such as “listening more, talking less” or “caring for people” because this is where some readers might think “*we need better leaders, not to get rid of them,*” which in turn actually emphasizes the importance of leadership, albeit an effective one.

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Reference

Buckett, K., & Mefford, C. (2023). *Leadership is overrated: How the navy seals (and successful businesses) create self-leading teams that win*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.