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5-2008

# Be Leaders. Do Leadership.

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### Recommended Citation

Posner, Barry. Be Leaders. Do Leadership. *BizEd* (Journal of the AACSB-International). 2008, 7(3):26-27.

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# The **Future** Is **Now**

What lies ahead for business schools? Four experts pinpoint trends that they think will demand attention and reshape the future of management education.

**T**he business school of the near future might look very different from the business school of today. As global commerce demands new types of leaders who can succeed in increasingly more complex, connected, and competitive environments, management educators might need to explore new approaches. In fact, they might have to completely rethink what they're teaching and how they're teaching it.

That's why, for this issue of *BizEd*, we have invited prominent voices in the field to share their thoughts on what's about to change in the world of management education. Specifically, we asked them to explore the potential changes to the management curriculum and the evolution of the business school itself.

In the business school of the future, *Barry Posner* foresees a fundamental shift in how faculty teach leadership and how students learn to lead. Schools will have to teach students to "do leadership," he says—to actually practice being leaders—before sending graduates out into the world.

*N. Craig Smith* expects an interconnected marketplace to force businesses around the globe to become more honest and transparent. Therefore, he says, business schools will need to put a greater focus on ethics and corporate social responsibility so graduates understand how their own actions can impact their companies—and the world.

*Denise Rousseau* wants schools to back away from teaching popular current theories and commit instead to an evidence-based management curriculum. Students who are grounded in basic principles of organizational behavior, she argues, will be better prepared to function in any workplace and solve any problem.

And how will tomorrow's business school deliver the curriculum that these experts describe? Maybe not the way you expect. *Clayton M. Christensen* identifies a panoply of potential disruptors to traditional management education. So many, in fact, that he thinks that schools will survive these influences only if they implement completely new models of doing business.

In short, successful business schools of the future will focus on fundamental principles while reinventing themselves in a competitive market. They will stay ahead of international trends, promote stronger ethical frameworks, and embrace 21st-century models of leadership. These are no easy tasks, but they are certainly achievable, say these four educators—particularly for those business schools of today that are already preparing themselves for tomorrow.

# ON Leadership



by **Barry Z. Posner** • Dean and Professor of Leadership • Leavey School of Business • Santa Clara University • Santa Clara, California

Too much of the time, business schools teach students *about* leadership, *about* leadership theories and concepts, *about* social psychological concepts as “applied” to leadership. Learning about leadership is not the same as learning to *be* a leader. We should be teaching our students to *be* leaders.

This “blinding flash of the obvious” comes to me after more than 30 years as a leadership scholar and as a business school dean. In that time, I’ve discovered that business students often learn what it takes to be a great leader, but they don’t learn to *be* leaders nearly often enough. Just as medical students can’t become surgeons until they operate on live patients, business students cannot become leaders until they experience what it’s like to lead.

## Leadership Is an Inside Job

Of course, that leads to the basic problem with the way business schools teach leadership. We need to do things differently because the development of leadership is fundamentally the development of the inner self; it’s driven more by internal forces than by external forces. But few business schools address the internal development of our students. After all, it’s difficult to translate inner self development to GMAT scores or the percentage of graduates hired. Organizations can only pay people to manage—there’s no pay scale for leadership. In this light, there are no extrinsic reasons for us to teach leadership—or, for that matter, for our students to learn it.

What motivates anyone to lead is, by nature, intrinsic. It’s hard to imagine people getting up day after day to put in countless hours to get extraordinary things accomplished unless they have their hearts in it. Leadership is about doing the things that go beyond a job description, like caring, like making personal sacrifice. Our students must learn that they’ll have to give up something—whether it be a meal, a night of sleep, or even possibly their last breath—if they want to make a difference. Do professors tell their students that they can expect to get ahead in their careers or lives by working regular 9-to-5 hours? Leadership is hard work, work that isn’t always reflected in our graduates’ starting salaries.



Organizations may pay our students to manage, but they will succeed through our students’ leadership. In this regard, talent is overrated. Organizations will prosper more by gaining a 1 percent improvement in 100 people than they will by getting the most talented individual to do 100 percent better. The question for business schools isn’t how they can identify so-called “natural-born leaders.” The question for business schools is, How can we help all of our students improve and develop the leadership potential they already have?

## Leaders Learn Through Practice: They “Do”

My co-author Jim Kouzes and I talk about leadership *practices*, because we know that it is only through disciplined practice that students can gain mastery. In every leadership seminar I teach, students rarely realize that, one, I really don’t have anything to teach them that they don’t already know; and, two, becoming a better leader only happens when they “do leadership.” We must assign students projects that require them to go out and lead and then come back and reflect on that experience. Only then will they learn to be better leaders.

Of course, I give them ideas, concepts, techniques, strategies, and all the other tools in leadership development in an effort to make this seminar successful. But they soon realize that the value of this class can’t be measured by the “grade” they receive. Its value lies in the insights they glean as they

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reflect on their experiences, whether or not their outcomes were successful. It lies in their realization of what they would do differently given another opportunity.

Indeed, the most successful assignment I give to students is a simple one. I ask them to determine an area of leadership that they need to improve—and then take action. My students have addressed their leadership roles in projects related to study groups, workplace teams, community service activities, startups, and even child rearing.

For example, one student recently had assumed responsibility for his company's relationships with Wall Street brokerage analysts who published recommendations of the company's stock. Normally, he would wait for his boss to devise responses to articles that created the perception that a competing company was gaining momentum in the market. As an assignment for my leadership seminar, he realized that this new responsibility was an opportunity to be a better leader. He developed an engagement plan, set up meetings with analysts, and shared with them how the company planned to compete to recover lost ground. He noted that "identifying my values and finding my voice gave me the confidence to take such a risk in my first weeks in a very visible new job."

When students and practitioners "do" leadership, we see yet another tangible benefit. They often record a number of remarkable accomplishments, many of which they would not have achieved if they had not been *required to do something different*. This leads to another keen insight into leadership—there is no shortage of opportunities to lead and make a difference.

### Leaders Make Great Teachers

The lessons of my seminar seem equally applicable to higher education administration. We often don't ask department chairs to be "leaders." We politely call them department chairs, but they are less like leaders and more like bureaucrats or, to use business jargon, managers. When do we use the term "department *leaders*?" Isn't it true that few of our faculty volunteer to become department chairs, let alone deans?

The plain truth is that, in most institutions, department chairs are kept so busy that they don't have time to lead. They are kept so busy putting out fires that their efforts are confined to responding to what's happening now, right in front of them. They have no time to consider larger questions.

And yet, figuring out what is important *inside* applies to our faculty as much as it applies to our students. Without

reflecting on what they want to accomplish, our faculty will not—and cannot—develop leadership. They too often ask "What should I be doing?" rather than "Why should I be doing this—or anything?" The present moment is the domain of managers. The future is the domain of leaders. Faculty leaders look ahead to ask: "What should I be doing today that will get us to where we want to be in the future?"

Perhaps most important, by becoming leaders themselves, our faculty can better guide our students in their own practice of leadership; in turn, their students' questions and experiences can deepen our faculty's understanding of the skill. After all, as many point out, if you really want to know a subject, teach it to others.

### Leaders Ask the Right Questions

This brings us full circle to the idea that leadership begins inside of us—it's something to foster in our students, in our faculty, in ourselves. It begins as we try to figure out questions such as, who am I? Why do I do what I do? What's really most important to me?

At the heart of leadership, the language of the questions we ask influences our thinking and behavior. At Santa Clara, we scrapped our traditional undergraduate and graduate policy committees, in favor of leadership teams—our undergraduate committee, for instance, became our "Undergraduate Leadership Team." It involves the same faculty members as before, but their responsibility is now different. Instead of only making decisions around new courses, reviewing prerequisites, and setting admission standards, they now also set an annual agenda around a question: "What will make our program better?"

It's a shift in language that helps us reduce the *administrivia* connected with department chair responsibilities. It has given our faculty leaders two primary leadership tasks: curriculum innovation and faculty development. And it has altered their perspective away from holding onto the status quo (managing) and toward figuring out what needs to be changed (leading).

I often point out that it is so much easier to write about leadership than it is to do leadership. But I am confident that the questions we ask ourselves have a great impact on both our desire and ability to lead. Most important, we learn to lead when we practice leadership ourselves. With that realization, I believe that in the future we should move beyond talking to students about leadership. We must create opportunities for them to be leaders—to do leadership. When we do this right, we can liberate the leader within everyone.