



Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading

By Martin Linsky, Ronald A. Heifetz

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To lead is to live dangerously. It's romantic and exciting to think of leadership as all inspiration, decisive action, and rich rewards, but leading requires taking risks that can jeopardize your career and your personal life. It requires putting yourself on the line, disturbing the status quo, and surfacing hidden conflict. And when people resist and push back, there's a strong temptation to play it safe. Those who choose to lead plunge in, take the risks, and sometimes get burned. But it doesn't have to be that way say renowned leadership authorities Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky. In *Leadership on the Line*, they show how it's possible to make a difference without getting "taken out" or pushed aside. They present everyday tools that give equal weight to the dangerous work of leading change and the critical importance of personal survival. Through vivid stories from all walks of life, the authors present straightforward strategies for navigating the perilous straits of leadership. Whether parent or politician, CEO or community activist, this practical book shows how you can exercise leadership and survive and thrive to enjoy the fruits of your labor.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Climbing Mount Everest: dangerous. Hitchhiking in Colombia: very dangerous. Leading through change: perilous. Perilous but possible, say Heifetz and Linsky in their encouragingly practical guide to putting yourself on the line and negotiating the hazards of leadership. As the authors acknowledge, many leadership books are "all about inspiration, but downplay the perspiration." This one doesn't. Leadership is always a risky business, but those risks can be understood and reduced. Effective leadership comes from doing more than the technical work of routine management; it involves adaptive work on the part of the leader, and a willingness to confront and disturb people, promote their resourcefulness, and engage their ability to adjust to new realities. But adaptive change always encounters resistance. Heifetz and Linsky examine four forms of resistance--marginalization, diversion, attack, and seduction--before presenting a number of practical resistance-response skills to nurture and employ. Some are fairly obvious (like developing and maintaining perspective, and holding steady in the midst of change), and others more complex (like thinking politically when dealing with friends, foes, and fence sitters), but shimmering nuggets of insight and practical wisdom can be found in each. The dangers of leadership also spring from within, however, and the book's final section addresses ways to recognize and manage competing "hunger" and learn to distinguish one's roles from one's self. The authors' points are illustrated by the experiences of leaders from all walks of life, making this a useful and inspiring manual for anyone hoping to put themselves on the line and make a difference in the lives of others. --S. Ketchum

From Publishers Weekly

Recognizing that it can be both lonely and difficult at the top, the authors faculty members of Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government set out to lend emotional and practical support. Whether leaders represent a local planning board or a Fortune 500 company, they "live dangerously," say the authors, "because when leadership counts, when you lead people through difficult change, you challenge what people hold dear their daily habits, tools, loyalties, and ways of thinking with nothing more to offer perhaps than a possibility." To that end, Heifetz and Linsky offer useful strategies leaders can employ, such as building political constituencies, trying to orchestrate the inevitable conflict, and forcing those who cause problems to actually solve the problems. Indeed, the book does dwell on the negative aspects of leadership, serving more as a troubleshooting guide than a how-to leadership handbook. Some of the examples are informal (e.g., the 1994 Chicago Bulls), while others are more traditional (e.g., city planning and politics). Showing a sympathetic side, Heifetz and Linsky offer tactics to help leaders not to take conflict personally. Remember, they counsel, you are more than your job. This book will undoubtedly provide leaders and managers comfort on days when everything seems to be going wrong in their department or organization.

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Review

"Widely acclaimed book" — *The Huffington Post*

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