



Leadership Can Be Taught: A Bold Approach for a Complex World

Sharon Daloz Parks

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If leaders are made, not born, what is the best way to teach the skills they need to be effective? Today's complex times require a new kind of leadership--one that encompasses a mind-set and capabilities that can't necessarily be taught by conventional methods. In this unique leadership book, Sharon Daloz Parks invites readers to step into the classroom of Harvard leadership virtuoso Ronald Heifetz and his colleagues to understand this dynamic type of leadership and experience a corresponding mode of learning called "case in point." Unlike traditional teaching approaches that analyze the experiences of past leaders, case in point uses individuals' own experiences--and the classroom environment itself--as a crucible for learning. This bold approach enables emerging leaders to work actively through the complex demands of today's workplace and build their skills as they discover theory in practice. Through an engaging, you-are-there writing style, Parks outlines essential features of this approach that can be applied across a range of settings. In the process, *Leadership Can Be Taught* reveals how we can learn, practice, and teach the art of leadership in more skilled, effective, and inspired forms. Sharon Daloz Parks is director of leadership for the New Commons--an initiative of the Whidbey Institute in Clinton, WA. She has held faculty and research positions at the Harvard Divinity School, Harvard Business School, and the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

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Date : Published November 1st 2005 by Harvard Business Review Press (first published October 18th 2005)

ISBN : 9781591393092

Author : Sharon Daloz Parks

Format : Hardcover 304 pages

Genre : Leadership, Business, Self Help, Personal Development

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Matt Rawlins says

A great book on leadership.

Ovick Alam says

So far, a thrilling read. Amazing class, breath-taking methods, and what Ron Heifetz's doing, is awfully difficult.

Khaled Saifullah says

The book that made my job tougher, though for good cause.

Mike says

Ron Heifetz is clearly one of the seminal leadership scholars, practitioners, and teachers in the field today. This superb volume, by Sharon Daloz Parks, takes off from where his two previous books (*Leadership Without Easy Answers* and *Leadership On the Line*) leave off. *Leadership Can be Taught* takes its readers through Heifetz's Harvard Business School course "PAL 101--Exercising Leadership: Mobilizing Group Resources."

For those of us who have studied Heifetz's two previous books and taken courses modeled off his HBS course (as I did at Columbia Teachers College almost a decade ago), LCBT provides an excellent refresher. My Columbia TC Professor (who must have TA'd for Heifetz when she was teaching at Harvard's Graduate School of Education) ran an outstanding version of his course in her own right.

Using all of Heifetz's key principles and pedagogical techniques (and a very similar curriculum), she put us through our paces in teaching leadership "adaptively." It was a watershed learning experience of invaluable practical value to me. Although my field is leadership development in secondary-school education (for both teachers and students), I borrow heavily from Heifetz's theory and work at the graduate level.

Although I doubt they were intended this way, I see these 3 works as a sort of trilogy on adaptive leadership. Heifetz's "Leadership On the Line" (co-written with Marty Linsky) is probably the most accessible of the three: clearly the place for any reader to start learning about H's powerful approach. "Leadership Without Easy Answers" is the most scholarly and thoroughly developed (with extensive historical examples, etc.).

Daloz Parks's "LCBT" concentrates on Heifetz's leadership course itself. What is the experience of taking it like for his students? How do--or don't--its lessons stick with them as they resume their professional lives?

Daloz Parks's answers to these questions are balanced, fair, accurate, and leavened with plenty of anecdotal evidence. We get glimpses of classroom interactions, and we hear Professor Heifetz speaking quite candidly about the advantages--as well as challenges--of his dynamic educational approach.

Any serious scholar or teacher of leadership **MUST** peruse this product of the Harvard Business School Press. One of the beauties of Heifetz's approach is that it works in virtually any area: from business, to education, to public service, etc. Its principles apply equally in the commercial and not-for-profit sectors.

In sum, I can't recommend "Leadership Can be Taught" highly enough to leaders and/or faculty in leadership-development programs of all stripes. Sharon Daloz Parks has done us all a great service in recording the impact of Heifetz's work on those fortunate enough to study with the master himself!

Shane says

Case-in-point, reflective learning is reminiscent of verbatim reflective exercises while doing Clinical Pastoral Education. A very effective tool when applied to teaching leadership.

Sandy H says

Although an interesting exploration of Heifetz's teaching methods and how they intersect with his students learning and experiencing adaptive leadership theory in the classroom, I found her extrapolation of how that that research applies in other settings weak. Her examples of other people using his methods were still primarily in classroom settings, only paying lip service to the fact that many people engaged in leadership development are not in classrooms. I would have far preferred her to follow up her research into Heifetz with examples from a not-for-profit person using these techniques with staff or clients, or--as in my setting--those of us in faith communities who are in the position of doing leadership development with folks who are unable to engage in long-term, classroom-like learning experiences. In other words, **VERY** different settings from the one Heifetz is working within. For those of us who only have access to people in short-term bursts of time, or who may need to incorporate experiential learning into other activities such as board meetings, it'll take some work to get from Point A to Point B in terms of how to apply his methods as laid out in this book into those settings. I was able to do some of my own extrapolation, of course; I just felt that was a weakness in the book overall. Perhaps if she hadn't started out in the introduction saying that she was going to show how it could be carried out in other settings--suggesting those settings would have variety--I wouldn't have been so disappointed that the majority of settings she described were still classrooms.

I did appreciate that she touches on some of the weaknesses of the theory in the end of the book--they were weaknesses I've been grappling with as well. It was nice to have someone put words to a couple of things I'd been unable to fully name in my head. (That being said, I am generally in favor of this theory--I just have other components I'm building around it.)

And by the way, I doubt you'd get much out of this book if you weren't already well-versed in adaptive leadership theory to begin with. She doesn't spend much time explaining the foundational principles or terminology--I believe she assumes you already know what she's talking about. Again, she's clear about what the scope of her work is--just know that if you haven't read any books on adaptive leadership theory, you're likely to be a bit lost if you start with this one. Read Ronald Heifetz's books first, then come back to this

book.

Margie says

Uses a course in leadership taught at Harvard by Ron Heifetz to illustrate how leadership can be taught. Outstanding book for those interested in the praxis of leadership.

Kristin says

I read this book in preparation for attending a symposium by the same name. I think the book has a really limited audience...those interested in a bold new method of teaching leadership...but, it's fabulous for that particular audience. In short, it's a scholarly report on the implementation of Case in Point teaching to facilitate the development of Adaptive Leadership skills.

Sharon presents examples of activities in enough detail to really help the reader see the divergence from traditional teaching and the powerful outcomes. The stories inspire you to consider walking out on a limb and attempting this risky method of teaching. I advise reading one of Heifetz' books first to understand Adaptive Leadership.

My tweet: Aligns Heifetz' adaptive theory with pedagogy using systems thinking, conflict, pause, image & insight, re-patterning and practice to address default settings.

Fred Rose says

Somewhat interesting. It's odd that this book was written about a course and process, done by someone else, not the author. Sounded a bit like hero worship. Teaching in the moment, or case-in-point, had some good things to reflect upon but generally sounded like it would be extremely difficult to replicate in a different kind of course. The main takeaway for me was thinking about how to bring in more of that element into my courses. A good article could have done that, not an entire book.
