



Redesigning Leadership

John Maeda

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Lessons for a new generation of leaders on teamwork, meetings, conversations, free food, social media, apologizing, and other topics. When designer and computer scientist John Maeda was tapped to be president of the celebrated Rhode Island School of Design in 2008, he had to learn how to be a leader quickly. He had to transform himself from a tenured professor--with a love of argument for argument's sake and the freedom to experiment--into the head of a hierarchical organization. The professor is free to speak his mind against "the man." The college president is "the man." Maeda has had to teach himself, through trial and error, about leadership. In *Redesigning Leadership*, he shares his learning process.

Maeda, writing as an artist and designer, a technologist, and a professor, discusses intuition and risk-taking, "transparency," and all the things that a conversation can do that an email can't. In his transition from MIT to RISD he finds that the most effective way to pull people together is not social networking but free food. Leading a team? The best way for a leader to leverage the collective power of a team is to reveal his or her own humanity.

Asked if he has stopped designing, Maeda replied (via Twitter) "I'm designing how to talk about/with/for our #RISD community." Maeda's creative nature makes him a different sort of leader--one who prizes experimentation, honest critique, and learning as you go. With *Redesigning Leadership*, he uses his experience to reveal a new model of leadership for the next generation of leaders.

Redesigning Leadership Details

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From Reader Review Redesigning Leadership for online ebook

Peter Mello says

Artists as leaders is currently a hot topic and John Maeda, as president of the Rhode Island School of Design and formerly of MIT's Media Lab would seem to be well positioned to write about it. Maeda is probably better characterized as a designer and thought leader than a traditional artist.

I enjoyed the book but think it could have been much better if he more openly shared the challenges he faced at RISD soon after arriving. He gives us hints of what he dealt with; however, it would have been interesting to learn more about what it was like as a leader to live through a very public vote of no confidence by faculty and students.

All in all I enjoyed the book and recommend it, especially to all those artists who are burgeoning leaders and leaders who are burgeoning artists.

Andrei Savu says

A high level take on various aspects of leadership. Short book with few insights.

Renee says

Pretty good snippets. Written in a bit of a jarring manner that doesn't flow great. Insights about leadership from his perspectives as a creative, a technologist, a professor and a human.

Julia Kulgavchuk says

The book is largely about Maeda's early time as a "suddenly" director of Rhode Island School of Design. It was definitely pleasant to read, and I'm very sympathetic to Maeda's personality after having read it. It has a good flow. What's left after the pleasant experience of reading has ended? Not much.

Yelena says

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David Martin says

Maeda is a bit odd. Perhaps that is exactly why I so like to read him. This book spoke beautifully on the complexities and challenges of leadership. It's recommended.

Farhan Khalid says

John and I have very different minds and ways of working. He draws to make sense of things. I take notes

Japanese Saying: Above up, there is something even higher above up

I realizes that I wasn't just missing a degree, I was missing a sense of simplicity

The word leadership is something of an anathema to creative folks as it invokes an image of authority and order over the chaos

Being prepared isn't a matter of how much you practice. It's about knowing that even if you fail, you won't give up

Work is easier whether it's just work; it's much harder when you actually care

Craftsmanship: it's working like you care

A creative leader is someone who leads with dirty hands

Designers are trained to solve problems through making and iterating. When faced with a problem, they immediately pick up a pen and start to diagram

If designer can't see it with their own eyes, then it's not real to them

Doing right matters more than being right

Artist don't distinguish between the act of making something and the act of thinking about it

For an artist, "doing the right thing" isn't about logically selecting from a set of evaluated options, but is about feeling what is right in the moment

All artists yearn to struggle. Without it, they don't feel alive

Artists are hyperaware of their surroundings

Leading by doing ceases to be leading when you are doing more than leading

Problem with drawing a simple explanatory picture is by the it makes sense, it's too complex to reuse

Watching something being made is a powerful way to understand a concept; trying to decode just the final result, no matter how simple and visually elegant, demands an explanation how it came to be

When I can convert a "meeting" into "critique" although it opens me to all criticisms, I oddly feel more at ease

Direct critique is the fastest way to learn how to improve

Feedback makes the mind grow stronger

I've made mistakes. But the artist in me accepts the possibility of being wrong for the opportunity it provides to learn.

Art is about the unexpected

Artist rely on their intuition much more than those who are analytically trained

Analytically people tend to take a complex problem and reduce it to its component parts

A leader's job is to get people on board with his vision

Clarity dissolves resistance - Heath Bros

What it lacks in efficiency I find is well made up for in improved clarity

The shortest communication path between two people is a straight talk

Real communication is made by finding the specific part in you that "needs" to join with those same parts in others

Sophistication is the craft of subtlety that goes noticed

Being heard lessens being hurt

Votes are blind, scalable, and measurable but simplistic in their ability to capture the complexity of opinion

When the right people are all in the right room with the right timing they can make the right decision ... right now

"Slides and documents aren't the point: discussion and decisions are"

Differences drives deliciousness

"Find the truth. Then show why it matters"

When trust is broken, you have to start over from the beginning

Change is managed by change

Rumors are like tumors

Constructive conflict is about building something

Destructive conflict is about tearing things apart

Enik? says

My favorite quote from the book is :

"What you say, and whether you are expressing it clearly, is more important than how you choose to say it."

AKM Nivrito says

An honest account of one of the prominent names in design in the modern era. His unconventional career path takes a leap when he "accidentally" became the President of Rhode Island School of Design. His accounts on leadership tell a story of continuous growth and learning, and he expresses the wisdom which the experiences and the people in his life brought. It is a marvellous tale of a leader who is a creative, a technocrat, an academic, and foremost a human. A must-read for anyone who wants to explore the path of leadership.

Charlie says

A beautiful little memoir about becoming the leader of a group that leads the world in design thinking. The son of a Japanese master craftsman, Maeda tells a collection of little stories about meetings and emails and listening that come directly from his memory, his feeling guiding the unscientific process of drawing meaning from the chaos. The book holds little strokes of clarity from a guy who had this massive responsibility thrust upon him and subsequently did his best, carrying his humility through the golden palace with overflowing platters.

Mindaugas says

Fresh look into leadership.

Thuy says

It's a short read but I think it will take some time to digest. His stories from "Start Here" spoke to me the strongest because it's where I'm personally at in my life:

> I received a phone call from a headhunter about the possibility of leading a major...institution. I was happy to suggest names of other people the recruiter could contact instead of me, since I didn't see myself as presidential material at the time. [...] I figured I should just "wait in line" as I'd been told.

I think more of his observations will become relatable as I gain experience. A book to put down and return to periodically.

Andres Moreira says

Short & sweet book on leadership

John is a great communicator. The book is short and simple, it talks about leading in different ways from different perspectives as a human, as a professor and others.

There are great phrases and paragraphs to re read many times because they are not only accurate but also deep.

One that made me think and I love it was,

«Learning is said to be most potent when “cognitive dissonance” occurs. Said more simply, we learn best when we are wrong»

Synexe says

THE MAIN IDEA

This is a very ‘human’ story of John Maeda’s journey from MIT Professor to President of Rhode Island School of Design (RISD). Using a number of his historical tweets as the organizing structure Maeda shows how over the course of his tenure in his new position he went from, in his own words, operating his “own ‘organization of one’” as a tenured Professor at MIT to learning “how an organization of more-than-one is run” as President of one of the most prestigious design schools in the USA. More than anything, the book provides an interesting outline of how one person dealt with his personal growth as a leader.

INTERESTING TIDBIT

Maeda was named one of the 75 most influential people of the twenty-first century by Esquire in 2008.

WHAT YOU REALLY NEED TO KNOW

Leadership is a humanistic pursuit. It’s about holding true to your values and leading by example. None of

this is new. What is novel in this book though is the very personable story that Maeda uses to convey these lessons to the reader. More parable than how-to-guide this short and immensely readable book provides a range of really useful concepts and ideas that one Maeda has learnt and used as he has developed as a leader over the course of his tenure at RISD.

THE GENERAL OVERVIEW

Organized chronologically the book works through the various challenges and opportunities that Maeda confronted in taking on his leadership role as President of RISD.

Given Maeda's background as creative and technologist the book follows these themes as he uses the various roles that he has held in his career as lens' to explore the way he has developed as a leader. Building on the 'tinker-tailor-soldier-sailor' metaphor he uses the themes of 'creative-technologist-professor-human' to explore the influence that these approaches have had on his development as a leader – for right or wrong (and there are some interesting mistakes that he admits he made in hindsight!).

Ending as he does with a theme of 'Human as Leader' and of the power of gratefulness one can easily discern the contours of the book. Based on concepts of the leader as part of a community and the creation of shared value the book offers much for leaders working across all types of organizations at this critical juncture point in history. A book to read...and read again...and maybe again.

Len Damico says

Only you, gentle reader, know whether you will enjoy an 80-page tome of someone explaining his pithy, cryptic tweets about leadership. I did not.
