

INTRODUCTION



What is the use of living, if it be not to strive for noble cause and to make this muddled world a better place for those who will live in it after we are gone? How else can we put ourselves in harmonious relation with the great verities and consolations of the infinite and the eternal? And I avow my faith that we are marching towards better days. Humanity will not be cast down. We are going on—swinging bravely forward along the grand high road—and already behind the distant mountains is the promise of the sun.

—Sir Winston Churchill

Click on your favorite search engine and enter the word *leadership*. You'll find thousands of books on the subject. Upon closer examination, you would find that they fall into three categories.

First, there are authors who focus on the skills and attributes of leaders.¹ Great leaders are intelligent, visionary, inspiring, persistent, knowledgeable, driven, ethical, and confident. They are also emotionally intelligent, effective time managers, skilled communicators, strategic thinkers, exceptional problem solvers, and socially skilled, to name a few.² Who wouldn't want their leaders to possess all these characteristics? Yet, short of Superman or Wonder Woman, is it even possible for a single person to possess all these skills and attributes? In fact, some business finance scholars believe that the long-term growth of new companies hinges more on the horse (the business idea) than the jockey (the leader).³

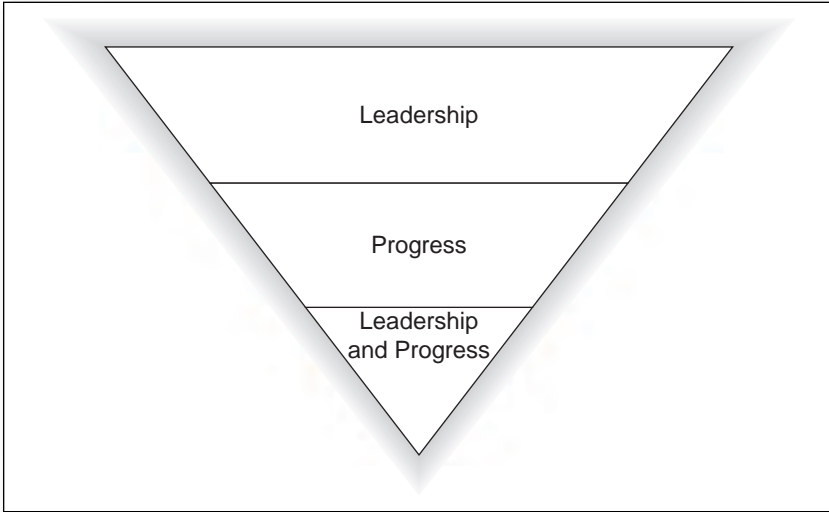
Second, there are authors with a more academic orientation.⁴ They tend to either review the relevant leadership research or propose a particular leadership theory. Many readers find the academic debates exhilarating and enlightening. Yet, the theoretical debates often leave little room for discourse on strategies and the related tactics. What should the aspiring leader *do* based on these ideas?

In more recent years, a third category has emerged that focuses on the leadership “secrets” of successful leaders.⁵ An almost dizzying array of titles has emerged. There are the leadership secrets of Jack Welch, Elizabeth I, Winston Churchill, Abraham Lincoln, Hillary Clinton, Mahatma Gandhi, General Patton, Alexander the Great, and even Harry Potter. Apparently, many readers find this “admire and emulate” strategy quite attractive. Yet, how does a leader know when a situation requires a Gandhian or Churchillian approach? After all, they deeply disliked and distrusted one another.⁶ We wonder how many of the “secrets” are mere platitudes wrapped around the lives of these extraordinary leaders. We suspect that their secrets may still be safely locked away in one of Harry Potter’s magic chambers.

Troubling questions aside, aspiring leaders could clearly benefit from any one of these three approaches. Many leaders have been enriched by thoughts gleaned from one or more of these approaches. Yet, often the advice from one approach appears at odds with that from another. For example, the merits of lean thinking (i.e., taking out waste or “muda”) seem to be in conflict with those of innovative thinking that celebrates some seemingly “wasteful” practices. What should leaders do when faced with advice that appears to be illusory or contradictory? As we pondered that question, the inklings of an idea emerged around a major gap we discovered in the literature.

What is the gap? Here’s the way to discover it. Go back to the search engine and enter the word *progress*. You’ll find considerably fewer books on this subject. Enter the words *leadership* and *progress* together and discover fewer still (see Figure 1.1). For the moment, put aside this admittedly crude research technique.⁷ Aren’t these results a bit odd? Aren’t leaders supposed to make progress? And that’s the gap. *Progress* should be at the center of any discussion of leadership. Yet relatively few leadership experts devote much attention to the issue.

Why is there virtual silence on the subject of progress? First, many authors are far more interested in tilling up the old ground than in suggesting something novel. They may well reason that it worked in the past; all we need is a new package. Second, defining progress proves to be a difficult and thorny task. Does it mean growing the company? Innovating? Continuously improving?

Figure 1.1 Book Title Search

Being a market leader? All of the above? Third, explaining how to achieve progress cannot be summed up in catchy one-line admonitions. We even lack a solid lexicon for discussing progress.

OUR PURPOSE

We wrote this book to answer these questions and bridge the gap. We wanted to reconcile the seemingly contradictory advice and overly simplistic lessons provided to aspiring leaders. Yet, we sought in this book to abide by Einstein's dictum, "Make everything as simple as possible, but not simpler." In short, we wrote *Transforming Leaders Into Progress Makers: Leadership for the 21st Century* and created the related Web site (www.imetacomm.com/pm) to advocate a more enlightening and actionable perspective on leadership. And most important, we want to help those in leadership positions become progress makers.

Progress Makers advances five basic arguments:

- Leaders must possess certain skills and a desire to lead, but more important, they must move their organizations to new and more vibrant platforms.

- Progress is a function of meeting the ever-changing challenges of an evolving environment and moving an organization to seize those challenges.
- The most fundamental leadership judgment is determining when the organization needs to explore new opportunities and when it needs to improve (or refine) current practices.
- Leaders who are willing to embrace certain strategies and tactics can become progress makers.
- There are many people in leadership positions who are not progress makers.

We weave our support for these contentions throughout the chapters. In some cases, we offer case study examples; in others, we reveal the findings of the special research projects developed for this book.

OUR APPROACH

Exploring. Refining. Platforms. In Section I, we explain these concepts, the foundational ideas for the Progress Model. These three cornerstone concepts provide the basis for understanding how to make progress. But you need a deep, intense, visceral kind of understanding of these three ideas to act with confidence. Merely checking the right box on a classroom quiz will not do. Almost anyone can learn to do that. As we shall see, great leaders—the progress makers—not only know the quiz answers but also know how to make the kind of progress their organizations need at a particular point in time.

Then we thoroughly discuss the notion of progress and the Progress Model. Next we discuss how explorers and refiners make progress. Hint: They take very different approaches. We conclude the section with a chapter on progress makers.

In Section II, we sketch out the strategies and tactics that will enable you to become a progress maker. These are not the normal recommendations found in some leadership books. In fact, some may sound vaguely paradoxical. That's a hint. As we shall see, progress makers embrace seemingly contradictory and paradoxical positions.

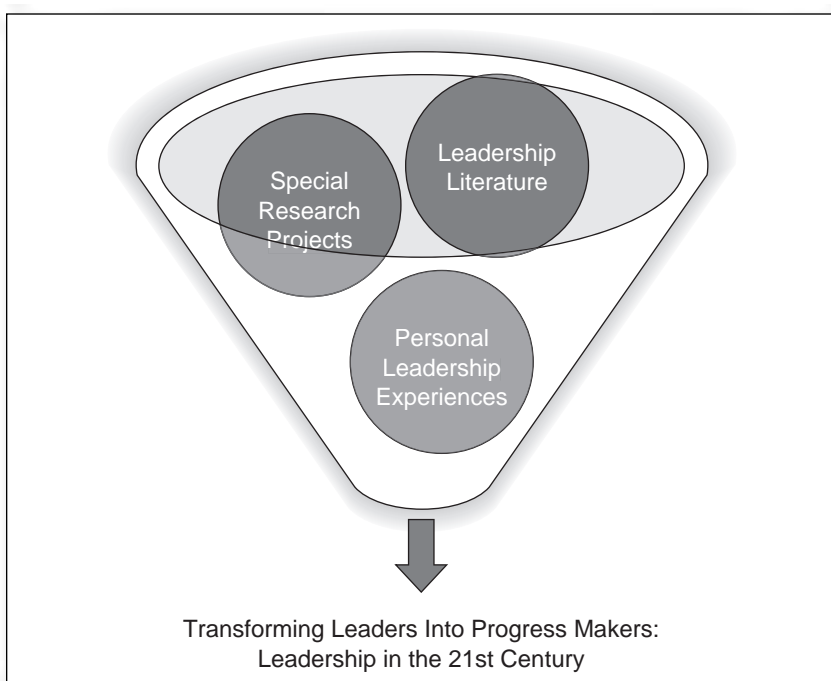
The seven strategies (and related tactics) we highlight emerged by synthesizing three different “pools of insight”: (1) leadership literature, (2) reflections on our personal leadership experiences, and (3) special research projects developed for this book. Numerous ideas worthy of discussion flowed from the pools of insight. We then filtered out the redundant and inconsequential, channeling the

remaining into seven essential insights that form the basis for the second section of *Transforming Leaders Into Progress Makers* (see Figure 1.2).

One of the special research projects involved interviewing leaders who we deemed to be progress makers. We used three criteria to select these people. First, they must have assumed leadership positions over an extensive time period. Second, they must have moved their organizations forward by both exploring and refining. Third, they must have had extensive experience moving from one platform to another. We crafted these extraordinarily compelling interviews into Progress Maker Profiles, which are sprinkled throughout the book.

In Appendix A, we compiled a list of all the progress makers we researched, discussed, or profiled. We invite you to take a deeper dive into the lives of the progress makers you find most intriguing (see the book's Web site at www.imetacomm.com/pm). You can do this by reading or listening to their life stories. We would be thrilled if *Progress Makers* inspires you to go on a biography reading binge. As you study the lives of other progress makers, you can often find deep parallels to the struggles you face as a leader. Oprah Winfrey, for instance, certainly meets our criteria as a progress maker. While she started her career in the

Figure 1.2 Progress Makers Insight Pools



news business, she established her first major platform with *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. As the host and supervising producer, she “entertained, enlightened, and uplifted millions of [TV] viewers.”⁸ That was only the beginning. In the spirit of a progress maker, she went on to establish other successful platforms, including Harpo Studios, *O, The Oprah Magazine*, and OWN: The Oprah Winfrey Network. When Oprah announced that she was ending her TV show, many devoted fans were saddened, some dismayed, and others completely bewildered.⁹ But that decision, too, represents the spirit of a progress maker. Why? Progress makers know when a particular platform (e.g., *The Oprah Winfrey Show*) has run its course and when it’s time to devote energy to other endeavors (e.g., The Oprah Winfrey Network).¹⁰ We will have more to say about this mind-set in the following chapters.

Transforming Leaders Into Progress Makers revolves around time-tested insights, everyday entrepreneurs, and a few high-profile leaders, such as Oprah. The right people armed with the right insights can change our world. It all starts with a click. The instant you see a link between leadership and progress, something clicks in your mind, snapping on a light that illuminates the way forward. We hope that *Progress Makers* shines a bright beam on your path to the future.

NOTES

1. See, for example, J. Maxwell, *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader: Becoming the Person Others Will Want to Follow*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1999.

2. D. Tourish, personal communication, June 6, 2009.

3. S. Kaplan, B. Sensoy, and P. Strömberg, “Should Investors Bet on the Jockey or the Horse? Evidence From the Evolution of Firms From Early Business Plans to Public Companies.” *Journal of Finance* 64, no. 1 (2009): 75–115.

4. See, for example, P. G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*. 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006.

5. See, for example, W. Roberts, *Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun*. New York: Business Plus, 1990.

6. A. Herman, *Gandhi & Churchill: The Epic Rivalry That Destroyed an Empire and Forged Our Age*. New York: Bantam, 2008.

7. We are making the defensible but tenuous assumption that book titles tell us something important about the content and perspective of the authors.

8. See http://www.oprah.com/article/pressroom/oprahbio/20080602_orig_oprahbio (accessed November 19, 2009).

9. See <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/chi-oprah-winfrey-show-end-link,0,6527512.story> (accessed December 1, 2009).

10. “Brand Royalty.” *The Economist*. November 28, 2009, 78.