

# FOREWORD

**Dr John Hewson AM**

The term ‘leadership’ defies specific definition and complete explanation, yet most know leadership when they see, or experience it.

The academic literature abounds with competing theories and attempts at explanation. The popular media is saturated with leadership anecdotes and examples. There are a myriad of academic and vocational courses offering to instruct/educate on leadership.

In my view there are a number of elements that are important to any understanding of leadership.

Leadership obviously depends on the individual(s) and their circumstances and, essentially, how they respond. Sometimes leadership is planned. At other times it’s just accidental. Some are elected or appointed to lead, which they may or may not do successfully. Others simply emerge as leaders by responding effectively to circumstances and challenges as they unfold.

Leadership is defined by outcomes, not attributes; it’s about influence, not power or authority; it’s about passion, not position; it may be driven by fear or opportunity; it is a potent combination of strategy and character. As Geoff Gallop says in his essay, ‘leadership is personal’.

Leaders can be incremental or disruptive; some are extroverts, and some are introverts. The clear majority of leaders (put as high as 90 per cent) are incremental, focused on maintaining the stability of the organisation while attempting to develop and grow over time. A disruptive leader works to break down the fundamental structure of things, to create major, noticeable change.

While the extroverts are easy to pick, some of the greatest leaders are introverts – the likes of Abraham Lincoln, Warren Buffet, Bill Gates, Rosa Parks, Larry Page, Steven Spielberg and Steve Wozniak.

Much of the literature about *business* leadership has emphasised a distinction between qualities traditionally associated with leadership – such as technical skills, intelligence, toughness, determination, and vision – and what is referred to as ‘emotional intelligence’, claimed as the sine qua non of leadership, which includes self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skill. I would add

integrity, humour, the empowering of others, and probably even more.

Two quite influential views on business leadership are from Jack Welch, ex-CEO of General Electric:

Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others

and Bill Gates, ex-CEO of Microsoft:

As we look ahead into the next century, leaders will be those who empower others.

There are similar assessments of the ingredients for successful *political* leadership. In my experience, skills and experience pre-politics don't translate easily into a successful political career. So much depends on how you adapt and handle yourself in what are difficult, dynamic and, mostly, unaccustomed, evolving circumstances.

With the recent death of ex-Prime Minister Gough Whitlam I was reminded of an occasion shortly after his appointment as ambassador to UNESCO when he was asked by a journalist what qualifications he had for the job; he replied, with a withering look, 'Young lady, neither you nor I have the time for that long an interview'.

However, I would draw your attention to two assessments of political leadership that I believe are instructive. First, Harvard Professor J K Galbraith who said:

All of the great leaders have had one characteristic in common: it was the willingness to confront unequivocally the major anxiety of their people in their time. This, and not much else, is the essence of leadership.

And Harry S Truman:

Men [read people] make history and not the other way around. In periods where there is no leadership, society stands still. Progress occurs when courageous, skillful leaders seize the opportunity to change things for the better.

However, there is no magic mix of personal characteristics that will make one a leader; there is no cookbook by which leaders can be manufactured, although it is possible to learn from the relevant experiences of others, to hopefully improve one's capacity to lead.

All this is precisely why a volume such as this is so valuable,

documenting a broad cross-section of leadership experiences, and of opinions about leadership – views from all levels and strata of our society.

The book includes the reflections of leaders from politics, the public service, business (both for and not-for-profit, public and private), and a range of commentators, thinkers, advisers and activists. It spans experiences from many fields, from science, through business, human rights, to politics, and many in between.

Clearly, with leadership, one size does not fit all. Indeed, it may be that the differences are at least as important as the similarities.

The book has prompted me to reflect anew on my own experiences as a political leader. It is suggested widely that virtually every politician aspires to lead – the so-called ‘baton in the knapsack’. I certainly didn’t enter politics with that aspiration. My objective was a more modest one, namely to become Treasurer – I thought it would be a good thing to have a professional economist in that role. This is where, and how, I thought that I could make a difference.

However, after stints as Shadow Finance Minister under Howard and Shadow Treasurer under Peacock, and in the aftermath of Peacock’s election loss in 1990, I reluctantly stood for the leadership of the Liberal Party and the Federal Opposition, simply because I couldn’t contemplate yet another round of Howard/Peacock leadership wrangles.

I announced to the first Joint Party Meeting that I believed that we faced three key challenges. First, to re-establish unity within, and between, the Liberal and National Parties, especially as Hawke had campaigned quite successfully on the slogan, ‘If you can’t govern yourselves, you can’t govern the country’.

Second, to rebuild policy credibility which I put at zero, following the Howard policy debacle of 1987 where his tax/fiscal policy didn’t add up, and Peacock’s inability to recall the Health Policy in the 1990 campaign.

Third, to restructure and reinvigorate the Liberal Party organisation, which I saw to be anachronistic, still back in the 1940s, especially as an effective campaigning force against an ascendant, and effective, ALP.

These were the three principal objectives of my leadership. There were two other fundamental dimensions. First, all policy

development was to be measured against the longer-term, national, strategic objective that Australia should aspire to play a significant leadership role(s) in the Asia Pacific region by 2000, and second, everybody, both front and backbench, should be assigned a specific role, with specific tasks, in working to meet these three objectives.

I hoped that in time we would be accepted as the alternative government, clearly ready to govern. In these terms, our parliamentary and media strategy was to be constructive and basically positive, to hopefully get out in front of the government on issues and in policy terms, essentially to attempt to set the agenda, of course while holding the government to account.

I aimed to have a detailed policy in every major policy area. While the result of this process, *Fightback*, which added up to some thousands of pages, was soon dismissed after the election loss in 1993 as the ‘longest political suicide note in our history’, I still look back on this as a very constructive process. From the time I entered politics I had sought to frame a positive policy agenda, and this made it much easier for Hawke/Keating to govern although they did not always take the opportunities presented. For example, as now evidenced by the release of cabinet documents for 1988–89, I argued that the government should be putting up interest rates sooner and faster, otherwise they would ultimately have to put them up higher than would otherwise be the case. This gave the government some policy room to move, and their failure to do so led to the ‘recession we didn’t need to have’. I also advocated zero tariffs, which made it easier for the government to reduce them; I led the micro-reform and privatisation agenda; I called on Hawke to make a commitment to the first Gulf War; when Hawke fell out with China over Tiananmen Square, I led a delegation to sustain dialogue on trade and investment, while condemning their performance on human rights – the first Western leader to do so; I led the first trade mission to Taiwan, initially opposed by the Hawke government but soon opened up for ministerial visits.

However, the downside of *Fightback* was clearly that it also made it all too easy for the government to run a scare campaign with an electorate that mistrusted politicians generally, an electorate that, therefore, was easily persuaded that I was lying, or could not, or would not, deliver.

Others, enjoying the benefit of hindsight, have tagged me as politically naïve. Certainly I misjudged Keating who, for example, having been rolled by Hawke on his 1985 tax package which had included a broad-based consumption tax, gave a most passionate speech to the parliament stating essentially that he would die fighting for it!

I was surprised, indeed, when Keating said to me on the first day back to the parliament, after the 1993 election, that I needed to understand that to him politics was just a game, where he would say or do whatever he had to, to win.

He had got away with the lie that the ‘LAW Tax Cuts’ that he promised and had legislated for could be delivered without a GST. In this, he was aided by a media fascinated with the colour and movement of the political theatre he created, and at the same time prepared to ignore (or ignorant of) his incapacity to deliver the tax cuts. Once he subsequently admitted that he couldn’t deliver these tax cuts, his poll standing collapsed, pretty much by the extent to which he lost to Howard in 1996.

The shock to me was that he referred to politics as a game. I had always believed that politics was mostly about government and policy, a contest of ideas and alternative solutions, a very serious business, genuinely concerned with the wellbeing of all Australians. In policy terms. I had always believed that good policy would be good politics, with a relatively short lag.

If politics was a game in 1993, that game has been progressively elevated to an art form today. Politics today is very short-term, opportunistic, populist, sometimes alarmingly personal and mostly negative; it is increasingly dominated by political apparatchiks who essentially see the game as the end in itself. The focus is to do whatever it takes win the daily media cycle, generally moving on the next day to another issue, another location, with other people, and so on.

So, as we saw in the last election, policies have been reduced to mere dot points or sound bites – ‘stop the boats’, ‘fix the budget’, ‘create 2 million jobs’, etc. Today it is a political imperative to be a small target, and certainly not to ‘do a Hewson’!

The result – good government is the casualty. While political games are played, issues and problems are left to drift, and the longer-term wellbeing of Australians is put at risk.

While much of opposition can be about politics, government is about policy and governing. While I give credit to Rudd for taking some policy detail to the 2007 election, both Gillard and Abbott have failed to appreciate the significance and challenge of this transition, and we are poorer as a nation for it.

The need for national leadership has probably never been greater than it is now. While it is no easy matter to say what that leadership should look like, in my experience, one thing is for sure. As the 6th President of the US, John Quincy Adams, once remarked:

If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more, you are a leader.

Hopefully this volume will help you do just that!

John Hewson  
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