

**The
Field Guide
Companion**

to



LEADERSHIP

Thinking, Being, Doing

New and Revised Edition

Lee Thayer

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*The Field Guide to
Leadership: Thinking, Being, Doing*

New and Revised Edition

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Acknowledgements

There is no way to properly acknowledge all of the minds that have, most inadvertently, participated in the making of my own. To all of you authors and colleagues who have shared not just your ideas, but how you arrived at them, I am forever grateful.

For improving on the title of this “Companion” to Leadership: Thinking, Being, Doing, I thank my long-time intellectual companion and challenger, Bill Taylor.

Yvonne Divita and Tom Collins, my publishers and best critics, have provided unending nourishment and meaningful challenges for the many years of our rich collaboration. May they not just glimpse but grasp their thoroughly professional and humanizing aims in life.

Over the past 4+ decades, I have been privileged to “rattle the cages” of the hundreds of CEOs who have attended my seminars here and in many other venues in other parts of the world. Somehow, in spite of my ruthlessness, they have seen that it has been my great admiration for what they do, and my intent to make the doing of it more masterful and hence more richly rewarding to them

personally and to those who look to them as “leaders” that keeps me going.

I have been intimately conjoined with a chosen few CEOs (a hundred or more) as partners in the tough and exasperating work we faced in the trenches implementing the process of making high-performance organizations. This is where you find out what it takes to make it happen. This is where you learn how to do it. You can’t learn how except by doing it. These men and women have been consistently and persistently the valorous heroes of the stories we have authored together. As Sun Tzu said, their real acknowledgement has come from the successes they achieved, and from the changes for the better in their own lives. I salute them but, as always, offstage – as it should be.

We face tremendous problems in this changing world we inhabit. In their own small ways, these courageous and adventuresome men and women have shown us how to remake the greatness that once was America. They make the effort – “whatever it takes” – worthwhile for all of us who can learn from them.

What This Field Guide Is For

This Field Guide is intended to serve two purposes:

1. If you are studying on your own, or in some distance learning program, you can use this Field Guide as a private “tutorial.” It will help you to focus on the important points. It will enrich the breadth and depth and the speed of your learning by the questions it poses to you to consider. It has been prepared as a companion on your journey. It can serve as a “teacher” – that other voice that prods your thinking and pulls you into understandings that you may not have gotten otherwise.

It raises questions that will help you to maximize your gain from *Leadership: Thinking, Being, Doing*. It offers examples, illustrations, and exercises to help you “dig down” to the full value of the concepts you will encounter here.

Used collaboratively with the text and your interpretations and concerns, it can be your “guide” to profiting maximally from your study of this book. Keep it close and refer to it often. Go back again and again. The better you are able to use it, the more you will gain from it.

Use it in lieu of your immediate access to other students. In a group, you would be exposed to a wide range of interpretations, questions, and conjectures. The Field Guide is a substitute for what might happen if you were in a seminar, and enhances your learning experiences if you are.

2. If you are leading or facilitating a group engaged in the study of this book (and related materials), you can use this Field Guide as a set of “prompts” for your leadership of the discussions. It will maximize your value to the group by adding to your interventions in ways that help keep the group on track, and at the same time enhance the value of the discussions for the individual members of the group.

You will, of course, be the one who learns the most. If you can use this Guide to speed and enrich your own learning, you can bet that the members of your seminar group will be benefiting from what is going on.

At the same time, it may be a matter of how the group itself is veering off. You need to function as a sort of “shepherd,” making sure that the group is heading in the right direction, and in an optimal way to gain the most from each other and the text (and you) at the same time.

Your role will sometimes call upon you to be the tutor, the teacher, the disciplinarian, the source of insights, and the chief steward of the goals of the group. If you are well aligned with this Guide, and study it thoroughly beforehand, you will find in it ways to fulfill all the roles you are called upon to fulfill.

The main thing is to be prepared for whatever happens in the cauldron of the specific discussion underway. This Guide will help you to prepare, and to be able to improvise – to everyone’s advantage.

How This Field Guide Is Constructed

Basically, this Field Guide parallels the way *Leadership: Thinking, Being, Doing* itself is constructed.

It will make much of certain passages in the book. It will seem to gloss over other passages in the book. It will engage in side trips, taking you off into places where the book didn’t go, but of equal value to the main paths the book takes. It will expand upon or otherwise

illuminate the key concepts of the text. It will suggest ways of thinking about and implementing (practicing) those concepts. It will offer examples and illustrations that are not in the book. And it will suggest other readings that might be useful to study because they are relevant to certain key concepts.

It is important for you to keep the two working in parallel. This Guide contains frequent “way markers” to point you to pages being referred to in *Leadership:*



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Thinking, Being, Doing (New and Revised Edition), that will look like the one shown here.

Conversely, know where you are in the book at all times. This tells you where you should be in the Field Guide.

Like any study guide, it needs to be kept handy to be referred to, and to return to again and again.

All learning efforts involve the perspectives of the author, the perspectives of the person(s) doing the studying, and how the two in dialogue create understandings that are sparked by the confrontation of the two. Your task is not to pass judgment on what is offered, but to consider carefully what is being offered to you. “It takes two to tango,” as the old saying goes.

This Field Guide becomes a third voice. Now there are three minds at work – to make all that could be made of what is asked, what is said, and what it means. This requires you to be open, willing to learn or unlearn, willing to go where those other two voices may lead you.

It is for your benefit to do so. Life is in the learning, not in the knowing. Think of this as the best opportunity you will ever have to study the unique, complex and challenging path of making high performance organizations, and the kind of leadership required to do so. It is the toughest thing to learn on the face of this earth. You can make this Field Guide work for you only by being as tough and as determined a student as the subject requires.

How You Can Make High-Payoff Contributions

*No book is ever
“finished.” Most could be
improved upon indefinitely.*

Rev. Ed.
Preface, Pg. vii



There is a further and very valuable way you can participate. If you see in these pages the need for a better (or fuller) explanation, for more or better examples, for more provocative exercises, or for richer illustrations, please let us know. And share any you can come up with from your own experience and observation.

The Guide is in this loose-leaf format for a very specific reason: to allow you to become involved in its further development. Based on your feedback, we plan to issue updates to the Field Guide that will supplement or replace obsolete pages.

Contributing in this way will be of immediate value to you, and it will add learning value to fellow-travelers you may not even know. You are able to make contributions to others' learning that will contribute to your own.

There are several ways to submit your contributions. You can simply send us your suggestions by mail or email, using the Windsor Media/WME Books addresses on the overleaf side of the title page.

Call the toll-free number, 1-877-947-BOOK (2665), if you have any questions about how to submit.

Or you can engage in the conversations on my blog, *The Leader's Journey with Lee Thayer* at:

<http://leethayer.typepad.com>

Note: If you want to be recognized for your suggested improvements, just be sure to include your name, title (if any), and affiliation. Or you can be anonymous.

Either way pays off, for you and for others.

And all of us WILL thank you for your suggestions for improvement.

Lee Thayer
Flat Rock, NC
September, 2008

Reader Contributions

Gontang, Austin “Ozzie” – pages 3-11 and 4-6

Nifenecker Sr., Gene – page 13-1

Peters, Bruce – page 7-5

Vanderlinde, Derek – page 14-11

Note on Notes:

Among the excellent suggestions we received from the preview readers was a request for more spaces for you to add notes, answers to questions, lists, and other jottings important to your thinking/learning.

Each chapter has a page or two for this purpose at the end, but more was needed.

Rather than presume to know where any reader will want to insert notes, we've elected to take advantage of the loose-leaf format and provide an additional 20 pages of un-numbered "Notes:" pages at the end of the book. You can insert these wherever you need them – and feel free to make more copies to provide as much note-taking space as you need.

Openers: Some Preliminary Stretching Exercises

Some people skip this.
Don't.

Both here and in the book, this section is not primarily about “content.” All of that will be revisited later, if this is a good “Overture” to what follows. Its purpose is to orient the reader to what *Leadership: Thinking, Being, Doing* is about, and what to expect.

Para. 1: What’s suggested here is that the need or the desire to make a high-performance organization comes first. The kind of leadership required to do so is contingent on the high performance *organization* part of it. Some authors do write about “leadership” in the abstract. But there is no such thing in the real world. You want (or need) to learn about “leadership” for one of two reasons: (1) You want to learn how to lead yourself to some individual achievement. (2) You want to learn how to fulfill a



leadership role in an organization, or in society. Both involve lots of other people.

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Para. 2: There are two reasons why you haven't been recognized as a person who makes a difference (a "leader"). One is that you don't know how (but are ready, willing, and able to learn how). The other is that you "know" how because you read a book or took a course about it. But you haven't actually done it.

Any actual knowing-how requires *doing* it.

So you *can* learn "how." But the test of your understanding lies in what you accomplish with what you "know." So the major part of your learning "how" lies in how you put into practice the ideas you can gain here. The book cannot do that for you – no book can. It's something you have to do for yourself.

Para. 3: *Leadership* presents two kinds of challenges to your thinking. One is that much of the reality of leadership may be contrary to what you already "know." It is often counter-intuitive. This is hard learning. Or, you may have had "experience." So you assume you already "know" what you need to know. That may be true. But great leadership is not about knowing. It is about learning. And, since you change over time, and since no two situations are ever the same, it requires learning how to do it "better." And better and better. The leader who is forever in the learning mode is the one most likely to succeed.



First paradox: It is this willingness (even eagerness) to learn and to un-learn in order to learn more that characterizes successful leaders. There is good advice and bad advice. Learning how to distinguish the one from the other is fundamental to your learning. Learning how to distinguish good advice from bad advice requires you to have a specific cause or aim. If it can contribute, it's good advice, whatever you may think of it personally. If it can't, it's bad advice.

Most people fall victim to themselves here. They assume that if they can't imagine being capable of implementing the advice, it's bad advice. Good advice and bad advice are independent of your present capabilities to implement. If it's good advice, you have to make yourself capable of implementing it. And make yourself incapable of implementing bad advice.

Conventional wisdoms
always and inevitably
produce
conventional results.

*“Conventional wisdoms **always and inevitably** produce conventional results.”* Bears repeating. And emphasis. Many even top-ranking executives (and parents and teachers and people in general) prefer the comfort of conventional wisdom, and try to use it to produce

unconventional results. This doesn't work. Great leaders and great organizations, by definition, produce unconventional results.

A person who wants to have an excellent organization may say, "Convince me that 'everyone else' is doing it this way, and then maybe I'll try it."

The way "everyone else" is doing things will take you down that great broad highway to "Mediocrity."

Do leaders share that "herd mentality"?



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Under the heading of "**Some Immediate Challenges,**" you will encounter some additional mundane but inescapable facts of life. One of these is that in order for someone to be seen as the winner, many others have to be losers. You can't beat those odds. But what is in your favor regardless of how things turn out is that learning how to achieve excellence and actually working at it is a way of life far superior to the life of those who do not try at all. You may not believe this, but you'll be able to feel it as you practice the concepts revealed in this book.

Some people wait around for the "magic bullet," or a little "fairy dust." None of those will do it for people who can't do it without them. Other people are not fully enough committed to the arduous path of real achievement – real excellence. Still others assume they could do it if they "wanted" to. This is all self-deception.

The “**Additional Stretching Exercises**” you need to go

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through slowly bullet by bullet. If you’re leading a group, have them provide examples of each bullet. If you’re doing this by yourself, recall or even make up a good example of the point being made. Make up additional bullets that seem appropriate. Bring in as many examples from your outside reading or observations that seem to apply. The idea is to “stretch” your (or others’) thinking as you begin to remodel the way of thinking necessary to effective leadership.

The next two sections on “**Revisiting The Lobby**” and

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Pgs. 6-10



“**Why Would An Otherwise Sane Person...**” are probably self-explanatory. They are also very personal. What you need to do is call forth some personal reactions to these parts of the book. Will those reactions get the individual where he or she wants to go?

The distinction between “**Wanting’ Vs. Doing**” also

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Pgs. 12-13

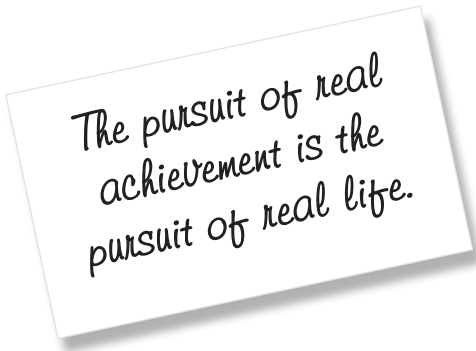


needs to be studied carefully to draw forth some honest reactions. How much do people live in the “Wanting” zone vs. the “Doing” zone? Is “hope” a method? There is no guarantee that if you study and practice, you will succeed. But the key is not “winning.” The key is taking the court fully *prepared*. What do you want this to mean, by exploring examples – from the ideal to the ridiculous?

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Competence and Control:

Here you are introduced to the unshakeable reality that without the kinds of competencies needed, you will fail – at anything, but particularly at leadership. And yet, that is not enough. There are always factors that bear upon outcomes that are beyond your control. Being fully competent means knowing what these are, and how to neutralize them when you can and to join them when you can't.



Given what you've studied so far, explain this to a person who is close to you. Or, if you're in a group, ask each person to explain it.

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Thinking Tools:

As you think, so will you be.
And as you are, so will you do.

Assignment: After you have studied carefully the text that accompanies this maxim, go forth and collect as many examples as you can that support or embellish it.

Go to the library, go to the bookstore, go to the internet. Consider also films and fiction, pop music lyrics and even cartoons and comic strips. Collect these for your own purposes or to share with the other members of your learning group if you are in one. Where do they individually or collectively take you in your thinking?

A good example is James Allen, *As a Man Thinketh*, which begins,

“A person is literally *what he thinks*, his character being the complete sum of all his thoughts.”

This is worth discussing, thinking about. Because how you think *can be* brought under your control over time.

If leaders can do it, why can't you?

*Most people prefer a problem
they can't solve
to a solution they don't like.*

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Assignment: Think through or talk through what that means – what that is supposed to mean. Recall as many examples as you can from your own life, preferably, or from observing others. How common is this syndrome, really? How many times must someone (even you) complain about the same old problems before you would invoke this way of thinking about it – that the person involved prefers the problem to the solution? Is smoking one example? Weight another?

Why do the same old problems persist in organizations?

If you wanted to be a leader, and understood that preferring a problem to whatever is required of you as a solution would inhibit your effectiveness, what would you do about it?

Assignment: In your study of great leaders over the course of history, can you find evidence that they did or did not believe that maxim to be true? Collect as much evidence as you think might convince a skeptic. Be a skeptic yourself in your search for evidence one way or the other. That's the way valid and useful "research" is done. If you are a part of a study group, share. How much evidence can you compile together?

Question of the day:

Why are ways of thinking discussed in *Leadership* referred to as "tools"?

Notes:

Notes: