



Reading Guide

How Leaders Improve: A Playbook for Leaders Who Want to Get Better Now
By John Gates, Jeff Graddy & Sacha Lindekens

Overview

Written by a team of highly experienced and successful executive leadership consultants, this book offers 10 data-driven insights regarding leadership effectiveness, accompanied by practical and easy-to-implement recommendations that directly serve the development of leadership ability.

Description

Outstanding leadership is highly desired and sought after yet surprisingly difficult to achieve: studies suggest that between \$12 billion and \$50 billion is spent annually on leadership development efforts.

What makes *How Leaders Improve: A Playbook for Leaders Who Want to Get Better Now* markedly different from and better than the scores of other books on the topic of leadership? Instead of dedicating their efforts to imparting wisdom on what makes a great leader, the three-person leadership training "dream team" behind this book explain how already-effective leaders can actually get better. *How Leaders Improve* is a data- and research-driven playbook for how any leader can improve their leadership abilities in a practical, immediate way. Authors Gates, Graddy, and Lindekens—all experienced executive coaches and leadership development consultants—have spent their careers developing leaders, and now they share 10 key insights derived from interviews with leaders who achieved significant improvements in their leadership effectiveness.

These data-driven insights are augmented by the authors' knowledge of the science behind human behavior change, as well as their experience in developing leaders. The book serves four audiences: leaders looking to improve themselves; organizational stakeholders with the responsibility of developing leaders; individual coaches or managers who want to boost their effectiveness in developing leaders; and educators in the fields of leadership, communication, organizational behavior, organizational psychology, and related fields.

Features

- Provides insights based on a sample of leaders who improved significantly over time, supplying findings that are based on actual research, not just opinion or anecdotal "evidence"
- Offers practical and applicable recommendations for how individual leaders, organizations, and coaches/managers can apply the 10 insights shared in the book
- Provides a novel framework for determining and assessing who is "ripe" for a leadership development opportunity (the RIPEN model), an effective way for individuals or organizations to determine in which leadership candidates to invest precious development resources
- Supplies strategies for enhancing one's ripeness for a leadership development opportunity

Discussion Questions

What are the 10 key insights that are explored in the book?

Which of these 10 key insights resonated most with you, and why?

CHAPTERS 2 & 3: RIPENESS

What does the acronym RIPEN stand for?

How would you define Ripeness?

What factors contribute to one's Ripeness?

Organizations, Leaders: How could the RIPEN model be utilized within your organization or team? What benefits do you see in using this approach?

Coaches: How could you leverage the RIPEN model in your coaching conversations? What benefits do you see in using this approach?

Which of the 7 Ripeness mindsets resonates for you as a reason to make a significant developmental change?

What are some compelling motivators or risks to not making the change?

CHAPTER 4: CENTRAL ISSUE

“Leaders who improve significantly over time tend to focus on one key area for their improvement, otherwise known as their _____.”

What are some strategies for determining your central issue?

What was the most common central issue theme that came out of Avion's research?

Organizations, Leaders: How could you leverage the concept of an individual's central issue in employee development conversations? What benefits do you see in using this approach?

Coaches, Leaders: How could you leverage the concept of an individual's central issue in your coaching or development conversations? What benefits do you see in using this approach?

CHAPTER 5: PENETRATING MESSAGE

According to Avion's research, it was discovered that the most improved leaders had all experienced a _____ that caused them to reflect and take action.

What are some best practices to utilize when crafting a penetrating message?

What is an example of a penetrating message you have received? How did it affect you?

Can you provide an example of when you had to deliver a penetrating message to a peer, colleague, leader, or someone you coach? How did it affect them?

Organizations, Leaders: How could you leverage the concept of a penetrating message in development discussions with employees? What benefits do you see in using this approach?
Coaches: How could you leverage the concept of a penetrating message in your coaching conversations? What benefits do you see in using this approach?

CHAPTER 6: GUIDING METAPHOR

In your own words, how would you describe the concept of the guiding metaphor from Chapter 6?

What are a few examples of some common guiding metaphors and associated leadership challenges shared in the book?

Which, if any, of these common guiding metaphors relate to challenges that you, your team, and/or your organization are experiencing and why?

Considering your own central issue, what is an example of a guiding metaphor that might resonate with you?

Organizations, Leaders: Reflect for a moment on the guiding metaphors that may exist across the company; many organizations have historical events, dynamics, and cultural norms that have created organizational-level metaphors that can be leveraged on an individual basis. Consider which of these metaphors actually work FOR you vs AGAINST you with regards to your company culture. How can you encourage these?

CHAPTER 7: CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS

Critical Conversations serve various functions, such as closing the _____, building _____, addressing important _____, and increasing clarity regarding _____ (just to name a few).

What are the 6 types of Critical Conversations noted in the book?

What is the difference between initial follow-up conversations and ongoing follow-up conversations? What is the specific impact of each?

What Critical Conversations do you need to have, and with whom? What is the impact of having these conversations? What is the impact of NOT having these conversations?

Organizations, Leaders: How are you engaging others about their professional development experiences? How can you help support establishing a “norm” around employees and their leaders discussing learning goals and progress/challenges to goals?

CHAPTER 8: TRAINING EXPERIENCE

In your opinion, what needs to be included in a training experience to make the learning relevant, impactful, and applicable?

How would you describe your organization’s current leadership training experience?

How can this training experience be improved?

CHAPTER 9: & SOCIAL SUPPORT

List at least 3 examples of sources of social support mentioned in Chapter 9.

In your own words, why is social support a beneficial factor that fosters improvement?

_____ is one form of social support that involves behaviors that are intended to encourage or build the confidence of another person by way of empathy, nurturance, inspiration and encouragement.

_____ is one form of social support that refers to a sense of belonging to a group with shared experiences or values.

In your organization, team, or workgroup, what form(s) of social support is/are most readily available to you?

Organizations, Leaders: In what ways are you currently utilizing forms of social support with your teams? In what ways could you implement new forms of social support for your teams?

CHAPTERS 10: KEEP IT REAL (WITH YOURSELF AND OTHERS)

The most improved leaders demonstrated authenticity about their strengths and their development areas to both themselves through ____ - _____ and a _____, and to others through _____ and _____. This mental and behavioral authenticity is what we call “Keeping it Real.”

In what ways are you demonstrating the four components of authenticity in support of your development journey?

Self-Awareness: _____
Following Up with Others: _____
Commitment to Self-Improvement: _____
Transparency with Others: _____

Organizations, Leaders: How can you encourage your teams to “Keep it Real” in support of their development goals? What is the impact of doing this?

CHAPTER 11: FOCUS ON STRENGTHS...AND WEAKNESSES

What is the benefit of focusing on both strengths and weaknesses?

What is the impact of focusing on one vs the other?

Organizations, Leaders: In what ways does your culture currently recognize and celebrate strengths? In what ways could this improve?

Organizations, Leaders: What opportunities and/or offerings are provided to your teams in support of their development journey (training, mentorship, stretch assignments, coaching, 360-degree feedback, individual development planning, career pathing, etc.)? What additional offerings and/or opportunities could be implemented?

About the Authors

John Gates is a partner with Avion Consulting. John provides coaching and counsel to leaders from the middle management to senior executive levels; he partners with clients in the design and implementation of high-impact leadership development solutions; and he works with management teams on issues related to both team and organizational effectiveness. John has a PhD from the University of Southern California.

Jeff Graddy is a partner with Avion Consulting. Jeff advises senior leaders and their organizations on how to maximize business performance by focusing on leadership and talent development. His background in human performance and sport psychology helps him live out his passion for helping leaders get the best out of themselves and their people. Jeff received his PhD from the University of Florida.

Sacha Lindekens is a partner with Avion Consulting, He consults with organizations to create robust leadership pipelines and enable executive teams to achieve their full potential. Sacha specializes in executive coaching and designing and delivering leadership development programs and has a particular passion in assisting leaders to deploy emotionally intelligent leadership. He has published several articles on the topics of executive coaching and leadership development. Sacha received his PhD in counseling psychology from the University of Florida.

Thank you for reading *How Leaders Improve!*
We look forward to connecting with you.