

Foreword

I was talking with an author friend of mine a while back about the challenges of writing fiction. As someone who exclusively writes nonfiction, I am in awe of people with the talent to create characters, imagine things that have never happened, and craft lines of dialogue. My friend shared the same apprehensions and amazement, and he related a conversation with an author who writes mostly novels.

It seems that in writing one particular scene in a detective novel, a lead character entered an apartment building late at night, walked up the long, narrow staircase, and knocked on the door at the top of the landing. The door opened, and a barely visible figure from inside the apartment pulled a gun and shot the man. He tumbled down the stairs, stone cold dead. Said the novelist about this development, “I was in a real predicament. I needed that guy in the next chapter!”

I love that story. It illustrates how fiction takes on a life of its own. How it shifts and changes as each character develops, as each scene progresses, as each interaction plays out. And that's exactly what Robert Thompson relates in his introduction to *The Offsite*. His characters took on lives of their own. They'd wake him up at night, talk to him, nag him, argue with him, praise him, encourage him, elude him, be uncooperative, change course, surprise him, but in the end offer him a unique way of viewing the world. That's what makes this book so special. Robert has offered us all, through his characters, the opportunity to examine The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership[®]—the model that Barry Posner and I developed nearly 25 years ago in the first edition of *The Leadership Challenge*—in a unique and playful way that gives new life and meaning to what leaders do when they are functioning at their best.

In *The Offsite* you'll meet Abby, Charlie, Gwen, Jerry, Sam, Joe, and Gordon. I think you'll recognize them as folks you've met at an offsite you attended. I know I did. Like all memorable characters in a well-told tale, they each have their own quirks and redeeming qualities. They each have their own personal back-stories. They will sometimes amuse you, sometimes annoy you, and sometimes enlighten you. But most of all, they will teach you, each through a personal realization or two. And that is the power of a good story. A good story teaches, and this does that with every turn of the page.

One of my favorite works of fiction is *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. In the film adaptation of Muriel Spark's classic, there's a scene during which Headmistress MacKay calls Miss Brodie to her office to chastise Miss Brodie for her somewhat

unorthodox teaching methods. Headmistress MacKay comments on the precocity of Miss Brodie's students. Miss Brodie accepts this as a compliment, not a criticism, and says:

“To me education is a leading out. The word education comes from the root ‘ex,’ meaning ‘out,’ and ‘duco,’ ‘I lead.’ To me education is simply a leading out of what is already there.”

To this Headmistress MacKay responds rather haughtily, saying, “I had hoped there might also be a certain amount of putting in.”

Miss Brodie laughs at this notion and replies, “That would not be education, but intrusion.”

We agree. The process of personal development should never be intrusive. It should never be about just filling someone full of facts or skills. It won't work. Education should always be liberating. It should be about releasing what is already inside.

The quest for leadership is first an inner quest to discover who you are.

So, sit back, turn the page, and begin a journey of self-discovery along with the characters in this finely crafted book.

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