

Preface: Ideas into Action

Welcome to *The CCL Guide to Leadership in Action*. It is the aim of this book to help you, as a manager, improve your leadership and your organization, and we believe the quality of the articles offered here speaks for itself. We thought you might be interested, though, in what's behind the articles.

They were originally published in *Leadership in Action*, a bi-monthly magazine that draws on the work of the Center for Creative Leadership. As an international educational institution, CCL has the mission of advancing the understanding, practice, and development of leadership for the benefit of society worldwide. Its faculty, numbering more than one hundred, carries out a range of activities including extensive research, open-enrollment programs, custom interventions, instrument development and application, and coaching.

Since CCL's founding in 1970 this work has followed a simple principle: ideas into action. That principle informs many aspects of this book, but two deserve special mention. First, the content of the articles is a product of CCL's practice as a knowledge community, a practice that takes a systematic approach to transforming ideas into action. Second, the presentation of the articles reflects what we believe is necessary for you to put the ideas contained there into your practice.

Practical Content

The ideas-into-action process at CCL is driven by the CCL faculty. In essence, the faculty takes promising ideas about leadership, tests

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them through research with managers and executives in a variety of organizations, puts the ideas that prove out into the most practical terms, and then disseminates them in various formats.

The ideas come from a number of sources. Most originate in CCL's research and educational activities, but many (as the interviews in this book suggest) are generated outside CCL, as the faculty draws on the work of other experts in the fields of leadership and organizational thinking. Whatever their source, however, the ideas are put through this action-oriented process.

Over the years CCL has thus produced a great deal of practical knowledge, and it continues to do so today. But just as important as the amount of knowledge produced is the fact that the knowledge is shared. Unlike the typical university department, professional association, or consultant organization, the CCL faculty is not essentially a collection of individual experts, although the individual credentials of the faculty are impressive; rather, as a knowledge community, its members hold a common philosophy of how leadership can be developed. They work together to understand and generate practical responses to today's leadership and organizational challenges.

What is this philosophy? It begins with the recognition that every person is capable of improving his or her leadership effectiveness. Further, we believe that an organization or community as a whole can enhance its leadership capability by developing the ways in which people throughout the organization or community connect to address their collective challenges.

Thus, in its educational work with individuals, CCL pays particular attention to the development of self-understanding and interpersonal competency. Feedback-rich experiences in a supportive learning environment are an effective way to promote self-understanding and motivate personal development. Among the learning formats that CCL provides are numerous vehicles for feedback, including 360-degree assessments, psychological instruments, and experiential exercises and simulations. CCL demonstrates a supportive learning environment by allowing people to decide with

whom they will share their feedback and learning and by encouraging them to identify how their own hopes and dreams can be aligned with those of others to build effective organizations and communities.

The educational work of CCL also recognizes that effective leadership requires continual learning and development from a wide range of work and life experiences. Although individuals are ultimately responsible for their own learning, organizations and communities can enhance leader development by providing and encouraging participation in a variety of work and life experiences that offer assessment, challenge, and support.

CCL's work with groups and organizations focuses on leadership as a collective or shared process. Leadership processes can be improved not just through the development of individual members of a group or organization but also through collective learning and community development. Experiences that promote dialogue among group and organization members and that facilitate new ways of working together are effective approaches for enhancing leadership in organizations and addressing complex organizational and community challenges.

CCL also acknowledges that the understanding, practice, and development of leadership are subject to cultural influences. Thus the faculty is working to better understand how beliefs and practices need to be augmented to work effectively in various cultural contexts.

Straightforward Presentation

The articles offered here, because they are a product of the CCL knowledge community, are an expression of this philosophy. In order to disseminate this content in a way that is true to the ideas-into-action principle, a systematic effort has been made to ensure that the articles are straightforward and usable in their presentation.

Each article considers an organizational situation that leaders face today and helps you deal with this challenge in two ways. First,

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it offers an overview that orients you to the situation, and, second, it provides guidelines for action. Not only do these guidelines supply suggestions for taking immediate action, but they also lay the groundwork for future action because they have been chosen to contribute to your ability to learn from your experience as you apply them. We believe that the consistent approach to the presentation of the articles will help you incorporate the ideas contained in them into your practice.

In addition to their focus on specific organizational situations, the articles offered here have a general practical goal. They aim to expand your leadership resources.

It is sometimes overlooked that how you understand leadership has a profound effect on how you practice it—and how you develop. If you view leadership in the conventional way, as a set of characteristics—or behaviors—that you need in order to influence people to follow you, then you will probably focus on your own individual resources when confronted with an organizational challenge.

If, however, you think of leadership as a collective process, one that individuals with particular skills can facilitate but that must fundamentally involve many members of the organization, then you may well be able to access far greater resources. Many of the things you do will be the same, but you will have some additional, perhaps crucial, options.

Conclusion

We believe this book offers a distinct value: the benefit of CCL's efforts as a unique knowledge community with a well-defined educational philosophy that guides the development of products to help people learn from their own experience about how to improve leadership.

You can learn more about the authors who represent this community in the contributors list that follows this preface. For those who would like to learn more about CCL's educational philosophy and methods, we recommend taking a look at another recently

published book—the second edition of *The Center for Creative Leadership Handbook of Leadership Development*.

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