FOREWORD

Walter Isaacson

The biggest regret you will feel when finishing this book is that you didn't read it earlier. All of us who have struggled to be good leaders would have found our way more easily if our paths had been lit by this wonderful guide.

John Hennessy has been one of the most creative leaders of our time, combining intellect with wisdom. As Stanford University's president, he was a great manager and executive as well as a visionary. In addition, he has mentored and molded scores of other great leaders. So he has a deep understanding of the components of leadership.

There is no one formula for being a great leader. Take America's founders, for example. Some were men of great intellectual vision, such as Jefferson and Madison. Others had great passion, like John Adams and his cousin Samuel. Washington's foremost traits were his rectitude, gravitas, and commanding presence. And then there were leaders like Benjamin Franklin, whose sage manner and humor could bring strong personalities together and get them to collaborate and compromise.

Through his own experience and from watching others, Hennessy draws lessons from various leadership styles and is able to distill ten core concepts. They are presented in this book not simply as abstract principles but with insightful stories and memorable anecdotes that bring them to life.

He begins with humility, which is fitting because that is a quality that is most evident and surprising in himself. Both in person and in

this book, Hennessy exudes the strength that comes from confidence but also the openness that comes with the true humility of wanting to appreciate the opinions of others.

We often think great leaders need to be driven by unwavering conviction and willing to ignore second-guessers. We think they need to have a healthy ego. In fact, however, the worst combination for a leader is to combine ego and insecurity, as happens too often, especially in politics. Both in this book and in his life, Hennessy shows how the recipe for great leadership is the opposite: being secure yet humble.

Two of the people I have written about—Albert Einstein and Steve Jobs—were not known for being humble. But in fact they each had a deep inner humility. For Einstein, it stemmed from the awe he felt for the beauty of nature’s laws. When a sixth-grade girl from New York wrote to ask about his religious feelings, he replied, “There is a spirit manifest in the laws of the universe—a spirit vastly superior to that of humankind—in the face of which we must feel very humble.” For Jobs, who was deeply spiritual, his Buddhist training did not rid him of his surface brashness and occasional aggressiveness, but he listened intently and fully processed the opinions of others.

Benjamin Franklin once said that he was never able to master the virtue of humility, but he learned the pretense of humility—he knew that feigning it was useful in dealing with others. That would seem to defy Hennessy’s second principle of leadership, which is to be authentic. Franklin, however, goes on to teach us, as does Shakespeare’s Prince Hal, that we become the mask we wear. In other words, when we have difficulty in mastering a virtue, it sometimes helps to display it nonetheless, and over time we will be able to internalize it. I personally found that true for another of Hennessy’s leadership skills, courage. As a leader of journalistic enterprises, I was often afraid to take risks, but by putting on a front of fearlessness at important moments I learned how to be actually more courageous.

Humility forms the foundation for many of the other principles that Hennessy describes, such as empathy and regarding leadership as service. It is especially relevant for one of the key concepts in this book, which is the importance of collaboration. As Franklin explained in his autobiography, displaying and then learning humility caused him to listen to other people, help them find common ground, and get them to work together. The four seminal innovations of the digital age—the transistor, computer, microchip, and packet-switched network—were all developed by collaborative teams rather than singular inventors. When I asked Steve Jobs what his greatest product was, he did not say the Macintosh or the iPhone, but instead simply said, “the team at Apple.”

Hennessy also explores the virtue of curiosity, which is a trait that was exemplified by my latest biography’s subject, Leonardo da Vinci. Da Vinci had an insatiable drive to learn everything possible about everything that was knowable. With a passion both playful and obsessive, he pursued studies of anatomy, fossils, art, architecture, music, birds, the heart, flying machines, optics, botany, geology, water flows, and weaponry. It allowed him to fathom how the “infinite works of nature,” as he put it, are woven together in a unity filled with marvelous patterns. His ability to combine art and science, made iconic by his drawing of a perfectly proportioned man spread-eagled inside a circle and square, known as Vitruvian Man, made him history’s most creative genius. That trait of wide-ranging curiosity is one that distinguishes the truly creative leaders of our time as well, including Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos, and John Hennessy.

There is one leadership skill in this book that I found a bit unexpected but also profound: storytelling. One of my early mentors, the novelist Walker Percy, told me when I left our home state to become a journalist in New York, “There are two types of people who come out of Louisiana, preachers and storytellers. Be a storyteller, because the world already has too many preachers.” That is the joy of Hennessy’s book. It is filled with lessons, but he conveys them

through stories. He understands that leadership is about creating a narrative. If you know how to tell the stories, you will be able to shape the narrative.

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Walter Isaacson is a professor of history at Tulane University. He was formerly the CEO of the Aspen Institute, editor of *Time* magazine, and chair of CNN. His books include *The Innovators* and biographies of Benjamin Franklin, Albert Einstein, Steve Jobs, and Leonardo da Vinci.

LEADING
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