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# Leaders Make the Future

Ten New Leadership Skills  
for an Uncertain World

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[ *Free Book Summaries.  
Created for Church Leaders.* ]



## Leaders Make the Future | Bob Johansen

Leaders Make the Future: Ten New Leadership Skills for an Uncertain World  
Berrett-Koehler: San Francisco, 2012. 264 pages.

*We are in a time of disruptive leadership change. In a VUCA world – one characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity – traditional leadership skills won't be enough. Distinguished futurist Bob Johansen's newly updated book Leaders Make the Future shows that the discipline of foresight can help leaders make better decisions today. We need not passively accept the future. Leaders can and must make a better future.*

Leaders are already experiencing VUCA, but many of their responses are not constructive and the prospects for leadership in the future are not secure.

Leaders need not be overwhelmed and pummeled by the world of VUCA. The future will also be loaded with opportunities. Leaders must have the skills to take advantage of those opportunities, as well as the agility to sidestep the dangers. Leaders Make the Future reveals ten new leadership skills in a definite order, moving from instinctual to complex.

Here is a brief summary of these ten new leadership skills with a key question for you to consider.

1

**Maker Instinct** – Leaders with the maker instinct are able to approach their leadership with the commitment of a job and the energy of a hobby. The leaders of the future will kindle this maker energy in themselves and in others. They will make the future and connect with others in making it. Makers don't always know the answers, but they're working on it.

- How can you draw out your inner maker instinct and apply it to your leadership? Future leaders will need both a can-do and a can-make spirit.

2

**Clarity** – Leaders must have clarity to be successful in the VUCA world that we are already beginning to experience. They understand why people crave easy answers, but these leaders thrive in the space between hope and hopelessness. Leaders immerse themselves in the VUCA world and – even in the VUCA world – find a way to clarity.

- How can you, as a leader, create and communicate with clarity in confusing times – without being simplistic?

3

**Dilemma Flipping** – Leaders need to lean toward action; they must be decision makers even in the face of dilemmas. Dilemma flipping is reframing an unsolvable challenge as an opportunity. Dilemma flipping happens in the space between judging too soon and deciding too late. Leaders in the future must learn to love this space, without staying too long.

- How can you improve your skills at dilemma flipping so that you succeed with challenges that cannot be solved and won't go away?



## Leaders Make the Future | *Bob Johansen (cont'd)*

4

**Immersive Learning** – Leaders can't absorb everything, so they must filter out extraneous information and learn how to recognize patterns as they are emerging. The difficulties of signal/noise filtering are increasing dramatically as data sources multiply. Immersive learning requires active attention, the ability to listen and filter, and to see patterns while staying centered – even when overwhelmed with stimuli.

- How will you learn by immersing yourself in new physical and virtual worlds that may be uncomfortable for you, exercising your immersive learning ability?

5

**Bio-empathy** – Leaders should reflect (as water reflects) nature. Bio-empathy requires seeing things from nature's point of view. Bio-empathy takes big-picture thinking that respects all the multiple interrelated parts and nonlinear relationships, as well as cycles of change. Bio-empathy is grounded in an ability to empathize with nature and understand its ways, its connectivity, and its resilience.

- How can you use bio-empathy to learn from nature and use that wisdom to inform your decisions?

6

**Constructive Depolarizing** – In polarized situations, differences are sharply drawn and communication has disintegrated. Leaders should look for opportunities for role reversal, a basic technique for conflict resolution. The idea is to try to see the world from the other side of an issue. Constructive depolarization starts with an ability to listen deeply and engage with people on all sides of a conflict.

- How will you constructively depolarize conflict to both calm and improve the situation?

7

**Quiet Transparency** – There are no sure things, but quiet transparency makes it more likely that leaders will succeed. Be willing to tell others what you are doing and why, but only when they ask. Anyone who is interested is more likely to see what you are doing and believe what you say. Humble strength is a desired quality for leaders who make the future. They will be able to do the right thing and be transparent.

- How will you lead with a quiet transparency so you are open but not self-promoting?

8

**Rapid Prototyping** – Leaders with the maker instinct will get the idea of rapid prototyping easily and use it to succeed. The big challenge will be for them to accept failures as important ingredients to success and learn from them. The best leaders will be those who embrace the process of rapid prototyping and develop the ability to discern the patterns across the prototypes, the ideas that really do work.

- How will you do rapid prototyping by working through many scenarios during the process of development?

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## Leaders Make the Future | *Bob Johansen (cont'd)*

9

**Smart Mob Organizing** – Future leaders will be expert users of the next generation of online social media that is foreign to so many current leaders. Smart mob organizing brings together large groups for common business or social change purpose, making savvy use of available media as appropriate. The electronic media are not, by themselves, what makes a smart mob smart. The leaders and participants provide the intelligence, but the media amplify that intelligence.

- How will you organize smart mobs using a range of media?

10

**Commons Creating** – In the networked age of the future, leaders will need to move beyond their own interests to create new terms of engagement, new environments in which they can make the future they want to make. A “commons” is a platform on which individuals and groups can build for the greater good. Leaders have new opportunities to create commons that address the challenges we face. The more connected we are, the safer and the more powerful we are – if we realize our interconnections.

- How will you create commons within which both cooperation and competition may occur?

These ten new leadership skills all build on each other. The order is intentional, building from instinct to action. As leaders learn and utilize these skills they will be able to address the VUCA world of today and turn it into a positive one.

The current negative VUCA can be turned around utilizing these ten new skills and effective leadership. When leaders follow these principles:

- Volatility yields to vision
- Uncertainty yields to understanding
- Complexity yields to clarity
- Ambiguity yields to agility

What works in the VUCA world is not only great clarity about where you are going, but great flexibility about how you get there.

The VUCA world of the future will be formidable and loaded with opportunities. The biggest danger is not being prepared – and you can control that by preparing yourself and your organization.

*The biggest danger is not being prepared – and you can control that by preparing yourself and your organization.*



## Leaders Make the Future | *Bob Johansen (cont'd)*

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### Recommended Resources

1. Bob Johansen identified “clarity” as the second leadership skill needed for the future. Read more about clarity-leadership connection by Johansen [here](#).
2. Developing leadership skills implies the existence of a leadership culture. Clarity Evangelist Will Mancini lists 10 ideas for creating a leadership culture in your church [here](#).
3. Leaders need to have some of the skills of jazz musicians, according to management professor and accomplished jazz pianist Frank J. Barrett. Leaders, like jazz musicians, need to, in Barrett’s words, “interpret vague cues, face unstructured tasks, process incomplete knowledge and take action anyway.” These are some of the same skills Bob Johansen writes about in “Leaders Create the Future.” Read more about these skills [here](#).



# Go Ahead Actions for Vision Clarity

by Clint Grider, Ph.D., CFRE

## Vision Clarity Connection

Winston Churchill once noted, “Out of intense complexities intense simplicities emerge.” In Leaders Make the Future, futurist Bob Johansen reminds us of the challenges of leadership in today’s world, while describing the imperative of building clarity-driven agility.

From a practical perspective, Johansen’s ten new skills offer a flexible yet intentional framework for decision-making, even when faced with escalating volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA). The timing of this exhortation is significant, as the author projects the next ten years to be more complex than any other timeframe his noted Institute for the Future has studied.

To deal with this, one of his imperatives is developing clarity, defined as a leader’s “ability to see through messes and contradictions to a future that others cannot yet see.” Getting there, however, can be elusive. Johansen deftly identifies the tendency to jump to conclusions through oversimplification, or without proper attention to the interdependence of systems. In a desire to lead people out of confusion in a VUCA world, many leaders will jump to ill-informed conclusions, or false clarity, that will result in disillusionment over time. With the stakes higher than ever before, the author urges leaders to be more intentional about developing legitimate clarity around strategic intent, communication, and external engagement.

Clarity ultimately is a choice. As Johansen reminds us, though “absolute clarity will rarely be possible ... leaders can choose to be either less clear or more clear.” The most effective leaders in the next decade will choose to do what it takes to grow the skill of clarity in their own lives and organizations more proactively than ever before.

## How to Go Ahead

Here are three steps to take away immediately from Leaders Make the Future:

1. Johansen discusses a number of personal traits that demonstrate a commitment to clarity. Five examples include:

- Curiosity about others’ points of view
- Knowing what it is you don’t know
- Expression of clarity through narratives and stories (vs. rules)
- Ability to find viable direction in the midst of confusion
- Resistance to oversimplification

Ask each person on your leadership team to rate himself/herself from 1-10 on each trait (1=not me at all; 10=me 100% of the time). Add up the scores to get one total number for each of the five traits and compare the five totals. Discuss where the team exhibits strengths and where opportunities for improvement exist.

2. Johansen also talks about characteristics of organizations that are committed to clarity. Five examples are:

- Clear shared vision
- Clear long-term goals supported by actionable short-term goals
- Lack of silos
- Ability of stakeholders to quickly state your future intent
- Organizational encouragement and freedom

As in #1, have your leadership team rate these areas in your organization and discuss the results.

3. Consider what specific methodology you will use to take your commitment to clarity to the next level. How do you plan to foster relentless, redemptive clarity throughout your organization over the next year? Send me an email and I’d be happy to explore this with you through a free one-hour clarity assessment.



## More About Clint Grider

Highly regarded as a “vision optimizer,” Clint can keenly identify the key people and strengths that are at the core of an organization’s culture. With this discernment, he guides leaders through a vision process that results in meaningful results and sustainable momentum. Bringing the gifts of encouragement and creativity to the process, he helps teams advance vision through increased passion and ownership. Blending this ability with years of experience building healthy organizations, Clint guides churches and non-profits to realize big dreams.

Clint has served in leadership and campaign roles for over twenty years in a wide range of non-profit organizations and ministries including the local church, major universities, and national parachurch organizations. He received his bachelor’s in business administration and marketing from Baylor University, master’s in educational psychology from Baylor, and Ph.D. in educational administration with specializations in process improvement and strategic planning from Texas A&M University.

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