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JAMES M. KOUZES  
BARRY Z. POSNER

Bestselling authors of *The Leadership Challenge*

## THE TRUTH ABOUT LEADERSHIP

The **NO-FADS,**  
HEART-OF-THE-MATTER  
FACTS YOU NEED TO KNOW

[ Free Book Summaries.  
Created for Church Leaders. ]

## The Truth About Leadership | *James Kouzes and Barry Posner*

The Truth About Leadership: The No-Fads, Heart-of-the-Matter Facts You Need to Know  
Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, CA, 2010 197 pages.

Are you ready to say yes to leadership? When you are ready to say yes, doors will open to entirely new adventures in your life. When you are ready to say yes, people will join you on the quest. When you say yes, you will discover your own truth about leadership.

In *The Truth About Leadership*, authors James Kouzes and Barry Posner present a book about fundamentals – and fundamentals are the necessary building blocks to greatness. You can't fast track your way to excellence. Leadership is a demanding noble discipline not to be entered into frivolously or casually.

There are enduring truths about leadership. You can gain mastery over the art and science of leadership by understanding them and attending to them in your workplace and everyday life.

**1**

### Truth 1 – You Make a Difference

Church leaders – including pastoral staff, elders, deacons, and leadership teams – must see community as the most fundamental truth of all. Before you can lead, you have to believe that you can have a positive impact on others. You have to believe in yourself. That's where it all begins. Leadership begins when you believe you can make a difference.

Somewhere, sometime, the leader within you may get the call to step forward – for the school, the congregation, the community, the agency, the company, or the family. By believing in yourself and in your capacity to lead, you open yourself to hearing the call. You open yourself to making a difference in the world.

**2**

### Truth 2 – Credibility is the Foundation of Leadership

You have to believe in you, but others have to believe in you too. What does it take for others to believe in you? The short answer is: credibility. If people don't believe in you, they won't follow you.

If you are going to lead, you must have a relationship with others that is responsive to their expectations that you are someone they can believe in. If people are going to willingly follow you, it is because they believe you are credible. To be credible in action, you must do what you say you will do. That means that you must be so clear about your beliefs that you can put them into practice every day. The consistent living out of values is a behavioral way of demonstrating honesty and trustworthiness. It proves that you believe in the path you have taken and, are progressing forward with energy and determination.

**3**

### Truth 3 – Values Drive Commitment

People want to know what you stand for and believe in. They want to know what you value. And leaders need to know what others value if they are going to be able to forge alignments between personal values and organizational demands.

You can only fully commit to organizations and other causes when there is a good fit between what you value and what the organization values. That means that to do your best as a leader you need to know who you are and what you care about. You need a set of values that guide your decisions and actions.

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To discover who you are and what you care about, you need to spend some time on the inner work of a leader – in reflecting on finding your voice. And keep in mind that it's not just your values that matter. What is true for you is true for others: they too must find a fit with who they are and what they value. Credible leaders listen, not just to their own aspirations, but also to the needs and desires of others. Leadership is a relationship and relationships are built on mutual understanding.

**4**

### Truth 4 – Focusing on the Future Sets Leaders Apart

The capacity to imagine and articulate exciting future possibilities is a defining competence of leaders. You have to take the long-term perspective. Gain insight from reviewing your past and develop oversight by looking around.

Your constituents expect you to know where you're going and to have a sense of direction. You have to be forward-looking; it's the quality that most differentiates leaders from individual contributors. Getting yourself and others focused on the exciting possibilities that the future holds is your special role on the team.

Developing the capacity to envision the future requires you to spend more time in the future – meaning more time reflecting on the future, more time reading about the future, and more time talking to others about the future. It is not an easy assignment, but it is an absolutely necessary one. It also requires you to reflect back on your past to discover the themes that really engage you and excite you. And it means thinking about the kind of legacy you want to leave and the contributions you want to make.

**5**

### Truth 5 – You Can't Do It Alone

No leader ever got anything extraordinary done without the talent and support of others. Leadership is a team sport, and you need to engage other in the cause. What strengthens and sustains the relationship between leader and constituent is that leaders are obsessed with what is best for others, not what is best for themselves.

Leaders alone don't make anything great. Leadership is a shared responsibility. You need others, and they need you. You're all in this together. To build and sustain that sense of oneness, exemplary leaders are sensitive to the need of others. They ask questions. They listen. They provide support. They develop skills. They ask for help. They align people in a common cause. They make people feel like anything is possible. They connect people to their need to be in charge of their own lives. They enable others to be even better than they already are.

**6**

### Truth 6 – Trust Rules

If you can't do it alone and have to rely on others, what's needed to make that happen? Trust. Trust is the social glue that holds individuals and groups together. And the level of trust others have in you will determine the amount of influence you have. You have to earn your constituents' trust before they'll be willing to trust you. That means you have to give trust before you can get trust.

Getting people to work together begins with building mutual trust. Before asking for trust from others, you must demonstrate your own trust in them. That means taking the risk of disclosing what you stand for, value, want, hope for, and are willing and unwilling to do. You also have to be predictable in your actions; forthright, candid and clear in your communication; and serious about your promises. Leaders are far better served when they're forthcoming with information. There's nothing more destructive to trust than deceit, and nothing more constructive than candor.

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### Truth 7 – Challenge is the Crucible for Greatness

Exemplary leaders – the kind of leaders people want to follow – are always associated with changing the status quo. Great achievements don't happen when you keep things the same. Change invariably involves challenge, and challenge tests you. It introduces you to yourself. It brings you face-to-face with your level of commitment, your grittiness, and your values. It reveals your mindset about change.

All significant and meaningful accomplishments involve adversity, difficulty, change, and challenge. No one ever got anything extraordinary done by keeping things the same. Risk, uncertainty, and hardships test us. Initiative and grit are imperatives in times of uncertainty. You have to embrace the challenge, control what you can, and take charge of change to be successful in these turbulent times. To deal with setbacks and to bounce back from mistakes, you need grit. You also need a way to find ways to learn from failure, knowing that it's one of the best teachers you can have.

8

### Truth 8 – You Either Lead by Example or You Don't Lead at All

Leaders have to keep their promises and become role models for the values and actions they espouse. You have to go first as a leader. You can't ask others to do something you aren't willing to do yourself. Moreover, you have to be willing to admit mistakes and be able to learn from them.

Seeing is believing, and your constituents have to see you living out the standard you've set and the value you profess. You need to be first in setting the example for others. That's what it takes to get others to follow your lead. A big part of leading by example is keeping your promises. Your word is only as good as your actions. You have to realize that others look to you and your actions in order to determine for themselves how serious you are about what you say as well as understand what it will mean for them to be "walking the talk." Your statement and actions are visible reminders to others about what is or is not important. And when you make a mistake, admit it. Admitting your mistakes and shortcoming goes a long way toward building up people's confidence in your integrity. It gives them one more important reason to put their trust in you.

9

### Truth 9 – The Best Leaders Are the Best Learners

You have to believe that you (and others) can learn to lead, and that you can become a better leader tomorrow than you are today. Leaders are constant improvement fanatics, and learning is the master skill of leadership. Learning, however, takes time and attention, practice and feedback, along with good coaching. It also takes willingness on your part to ask for support.

You can develop yourself as a leader, but it takes a continuous personal investment. It takes time, it takes deliberate practice, it requires setting improvement goals, staying open to feedback, working on your strengths and weaknesses, and having the support of others.

Moreover, the very best leaders also believe that it's possible for everyone to learn to lead. By assuming that leadership is learnable, you stay open to opportunities to turn the workplace into a practice field and every experience into a chance to grow. By believing in yourself and your capacity to lead, you make sure you're prepared to take advantage of the many opportunities that are open to you.

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**10**

### Truth 10 – Leadership is an Affair of the Heart

It could also be the first truth. Leaders are in love with their constituents, their customers and clients, and the mission they are serving. Leaders make others feel important and are gracious in showing their appreciation. Love is the motivation that energizes leaders to give so much for others. You just won't work hard enough to become great if you aren't doing what you love.

Leaders put their hearts in their organizations and their organizations in their hearts. They love what they're doing and they stay in love with leading, with the people who do the work, with what their organizations produce, and with those who honor them by using their products and services. They show they care by paying attention to people, sharing success stories, and making people feel important and special. Exemplary leaders are positive and upbeat, generating the emotional energy that enables others to flourish.

*The ten truths about leadership reinforce the truth that, while the context of leadership changes, the content of leadership endures. There are certain fundamentals that support everything that leaders do, and those essentials will continue to inform what leaders do long into the future.*

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### Recommended Resources

1. **Read** a list of 10 ideas for creating a leadership culture by Auxano Founder and Team Leader Will Mancini.
2. **Read** how you can unlock 5 motivations for working in your ministry leadership by Will Mancini.
3. **Watch** authors Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner discuss *The Truth About Leadership* in this brief video.
4. Read best-selling author Marshall as he discusses *The Truth About Leadership* **Part 1** and **Part 2**.

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## Go Ahead Actions for Vision Clarity

by Mike Gammill

### Vision Clarity Connection

If you're reading *The Truth about Leadership*, then you probably know you don't have all the answers. You're self-aware enough to understand that focused passion is necessary, but that all your indignation isn't righteous discontent. You know that when something goes wrong, it might not be your fault, but the way go forward is your responsibility.

What is the one truth about leadership that matters the most to you and your church right now?

### Go Ahead

To help answer this larger question, ask these three:

1. What is the most significant challenge we are facing in the next twelve months?
2. What is the greatest opportunity we could miss if we don't make the right decisions quickly enough?
3. Which one truth (of the *Ten Truths of Leadership*) resonates most deeply with my soul, and is "seconded" by those who know the church and me the best?

It is said that one of the secrets of genius is the ability to focus on what really matters. Use these three questions to identify the one thing about your leadership that matters most to your church right now and focus on that truth over the next twelve months.

To move ahead you don't need all the answers. Over the next twelve months, search scripture daily, monthly meet with a trusted dialogue partner, and seek out a seasoned ministry expert/mentor to meet with twice in the next twelve months.



## More About Mike Gammill

As Lead Navigator for Auxano, Mike Gammill is passionate about using Vision Clarity to help the local church find its unique place in the Kingdom of God. Mike has fifteen years of experience serving the local church in multiple capacities and has a demonstrated ability to walk alongside pastors and leaders to uncover innovative ways to strategically implement vision through Christ-like leadership.

Email: [mike@auxano.com](mailto:mike@auxano.com)

Twitter: [@mikegammill](https://twitter.com/mikegammill)

Blog: [mikegammill.com](http://mikegammill.com)

Phone: 406.219.1104

Bio: [Read More](#)



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