



THE
INFLUENTIAL
LEADER

**IGNITING VISIONARY
DECISION MAKING**

JOHN EDMUND HAGGAI

THE INFLUENTIAL LEADER

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*To the memory of
Dr. Han Kyung Chik of Korea,
Justice Lai Kew Chai of Singapore, and
Cecil B. Day of Atlanta, Georgia, USA*

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PREFACE

I have circled the world more than a hundred times. For 60 years, I have been observing leaders from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Oceania. I have been with heads of state and heads of corporations and international bankers. I have made it my quest to study top leaders and determine what makes them great.

The first thing to say about leadership is this: Leadership frequently gets mistaken for other things. “Too often, attempts to analyze leadership tend to fail because the would-be analyst misconceives his task. He usually does not study leadership at all. Instead, he studies popularity, power, showmanship, or wisdom in long-range planning.”¹

So said the celebrated psychologist W.C.H. Prentice, writing for the *Harvard Business Review*. Prentice was right. To his list of mistaken definitions of leadership, I could add many more: organizational acumen, administrative expertise, and sheer hard work. All of these are important. But none addresses the subject of leadership.

I believe that leadership consists of *decisions*. Influential leadership, by which I mean broadly leadership that changes the world for the good, consists of decisions, big and small, that derive their inspiration and direction from a single life aim.

For many years now, Haggai Institute has been providing advanced leadership training to highly positioned leaders from the developing world. Men and women who are already great leaders come to Haggai Institute to hone and sharpen their leadership skills.

Among the multiple tens of thousands of people who have been through this training are leading statesmen, authors, generals, university presidents, architects, lawyers, archbishops, celebrated doctors, media moguls, and many others. Influential leaders exist in every culture and profession. And they all demonstrate a propensity to make what in this book I refer to as “visionary decisions.”

Leadership also transcends cultures—in spite of the enormous cultural differences that separate the peoples of the earth. And yet influential leadership is a constant, like the law of gravity. Drop a stone in Beijing, and it will fall to the ground just as surely as it does in New York. So it is with the power of visionary decision making.

Leadership also transcends all forms of organization. People talk about “business leadership” and “political leadership” and “military leadership.” Yet the fundamentals underlying good leadership have nothing to do with the specifics of business or politics or warfare. Being a discipline in itself, leadership applies with equal effectiveness to any organization and any purpose.

For that reason, I have drawn examples from a range of areas. Many of the people I discuss are business leaders. Others are leaders of nations, leaders of movements, leaders of universities, leaders of communities. All are relevant. In particular, I have made a close study of the leadership shown by Jesus Christ, who qualifies as simply the greatest leader who ever lived.

The ideas in this book are important not only for those who lead big corporations, but for those who lead small organizations as well. Many people reading this book will exercise their leadership in a local neighborhood group or church. Many more, who work in larger corporations, will also occupy leadership positions in groups outside the workplace. Almost all will have some kind of leadership role among friends and family.

This book aims to demystify leadership practice in every area. It aims to encourage potential leaders to overcome their fear of risk. It aims to help you rise to your full potential.

Preface

I hope you will read the following pages carefully, then read them again, then write notes all over them to help you internalize and apply the ideas they contain.

These twelve chapters outline major visionary decisions—decisive steps that you can take to move toward being an influential leader. They are not sequential steps; you do not have to become a persuasive communicator *before* you can profit from impossible setbacks. But every step, in every area, will help ignite the kind of thinking and the kind of action that characterizes the world's great leaders.

Leadership is an awesome responsibility and a God-given privilege. I hope and pray that, through reading this book, your leadership will become, not just competent, but truly influential.

John Edmund Haggai
Atlanta, Georgia, U.S.A.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The inspiration for this book began with my parents. My father's example in leadership I refer to in the first chapter. I must also mention my mother, whose ability to communicate with people of all ages, echelons, and cultures still guides my thinking and, I hope, my relationships. She steered me toward great reading and writing. Not once did she belittle my dreams.

Besides my parents, I can name a host of others whose contribution to my life and understanding has influenced this volume—only some of whom I have space to acknowledge here.

Tom Haggai, my brother, with whom I have interacted for more than 50 years on the subject of leadership.

Three missionaries, all deceased, who made a profound impact on my early days, from four years of age to eighteen years of age: Paul Metzler, Carl Tanis, and Paul Fleming.

Ernest H. Watson of Australia, of whom you will read in this book. Sir Cyril Black of Wimbledon, England.

Paul M. Cell, who first opened my eyes to the importance and teaching of the stewardship of money.

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J.C. Masee, who influenced my life from 1938 until he passed away at the age of 94.

Paul J. Meyer, progenitor of Success Motivation Institute of Waco, Texas. Leaders in 75 nations concur he has produced the best motivation materials available. I recommend them without reservation.

Dr. Anthony D'Souza of the Xavier Institute of Leadership in Mumbai (Bombay) and faculty member of Haggai Institute.

Michael Youssef, much of whose Ph.D. work focused on the father of contemporary leadership studies, Max Weber of Germany.

Dr. Benjamin Moraes of Brazil.

Bishop Chandu Ray of Pakistan and Australia.

Dr. George Samuel of India.

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Larry Stone, whose superb editing and counsel brought an earlier volume on leadership to a final conclusion and publication—and thus impacted this book.

Norma Byrd, my research and literary assistant, whose expertise in checking out syntax, grammar, and structure made for greater clarity.

Dr. Won Sul Lee of Korea, who urged me for ten years to write a book on leadership.

David Lee, my literary alter ego.

Finally I want to give special thanks to my wife, Christine, for patiently enduring my long stretches of preoccupation during the writing of the book. Her influence, in ministry as well as the home, has been extensive.



INTRODUCTION

THE INFLUENTIAL LEADER

I remember vividly the day I stole my dad's car.

I was 13. My father, a clergyman, had walked to choir practice about two miles away. That meant the car was free.

Going into his closet, I took out the suit he had been wearing that day, pulled the trousers off the hanger, grabbed them by the cuffs, and shook them vigorously. With a *clink* the keys hit the floor.

I told my brother Ted, who was about 12, that I planned to take the car for a spin. I knew he'd refuse to come. I had no passion for Ted's company, but I knew that making him a conspirator was the best way to keep him quiet.

I drove my father's car—a distinctive black 1932 Oldsmobile sedan with yellow spoke wheels—to the top of Power Brothers Hill outside Brockton, Massachusetts, and then jammed the accelerator to the floor.

I was probably doing 70 miles an hour when I roared past another vehicle coming the other direction. I didn't know it then, but the other vehicle contained a member of the choir—and my grandfather.

When my grandfather reached the choir practice, he was dumbfounded to see my father already there.

"Waddy," he said, "how could you get her so soon? I just saw you driving lickety-split toward Brockton!"

That did it. In about an hour my brother Ted arrived with the

breaking news. “Dad and all the choir members know that you were driving the car!”

It was a Friday night. I retired hastily to my room. For some reason I had no desire to get up on Saturday morning and face the music. My father, a disciplinarian of the old school, never hesitated to administer punitive action in the wake of disobedience.

I stayed in bed until I could stand the hunger pains no longer. At about ten o'clock I walked downstairs. Dad was sitting in his rocking chair, reading.

*Dad never said a word to me about the episode.
He never brought it up.*

“Good morning, Son,” he said.

I responded quietly, “Hi, Dad.”

I briefly scanned his face for some evidence of impending doom, but found none. In fact, Dad never said a word to me about the episode. He never brought it up.

For six weeks I walked around like an overheated boiler, full of guilt and uncertainty. Finally I couldn't take it any longer. I went to my father and blurted out, “Dad, I'm sorry!”

Looking up, he raised an eyebrow. “Oh? Sorry for what?”

He wasn't going to make this easy. I swallowed hard.

“I'm sorry for breaking the law and violating your trust by taking the car out for a ride.”

Silence set in.

Then, to my surprise, Dad put his arm around me and said, “I'm glad you owned up to it, Son.”

The look on my face probably alerted him to my most pressing concern—what punishment he would mete out to settle the score.

But Dad only looked me in the eye and added, “I think you have already suffered enough.”

I never took the car again. And looking back, Dad's handling of this episode—which must have seemed a minor matter in comparison to the many other pressures he confronted—marked my first glimpse of what real leadership is all about.

Visionary Decisions

Globally, those occupying leadership positions probably number in the hundred millions. But only a minority of them will qualify for the title “influential leaders”—that is, leaders who use their influence to transform the world around them and leave a lasting impact for good.

What sets apart influential leaders?

It's easy to rattle off a few highly respected names—George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela—and conclude that such people are set apart by the times they lived in, by their education, by their high ideals, or simply by being unusually good.

But all that misses the point.

In the last 80 years I have met hundreds of influential leaders. I have observed the advanced training of influential leaders. And I have read the biographies of influential leaders I can no longer reach on the phone. I can say with assurance that not all of these men and women score highly on the scales of sainthood or academic intelligence. Each of them has one dominant characteristic: *a particular way of making decisions*.

*The trail of decisions a leader leaves behind him
charts the trajectory of his influence.*

Decision making sits at the heart of leadership. In fact leadership really boils down to a constant execution of decisions, big and small, day in, day out. And the trail of decisions a leader leaves behind him charts the trajectory of his influence.

In my father's case, the trail began with his decision to flee from persecution in Syria and become an American citizen. Throughout his long life, he exerted a powerful influence—by his preaching, by his example, and by stories told worldwide to leaders who never met him. Like all influential leaders, he had a gift for “visionary decision making” that showed itself in everything he did.

Faced with a young joyriding teenager, most parents would wade into a lecture on the evils of irresponsible risk-taking. They would then summarily ground the offender in the belief that swift recompense will make him “think twice before pulling a stunt like that again.”

Dad took a different line. He could have bawled me out, or worse; after all, quite apart from the charges of reckless endangerment, I'd broken the law. Instead, he let me stew. And he let me stew for *six weeks* without once letting it affect either his composure or the order of the household.

This was a man who knew clearly where his priorities lay. Almost everything he did was guided by his spiritual commitment. So when eldest son John Edmund rashly put at risk both his own life and the reputation of the pastor's family, Dad sat on his urge to lash out. Instead he chose a course of action that would bring me to recognize, of my own volition, both the magnitude of my error and the need for corrective action.

Visionary decision making makes a direct connection between the here and now and a leader's deepest aims and aspirations.

It worked.

I call this “visionary decision making” because it makes a direct connection between the here and now and a leader's deepest aims and aspirations. It applies to decision making everywhere, from the home to the highest corporate boardroom. It goes beyond simple goal setting.

It denotes a meticulous consistency between daily decisions and your answer to the question: “What is your life ultimately about?”

Amazingly, the multimillion dollar media industry centered on the concept of leadership has almost nothing to say about this. You won’t find this issue addressed at most fancy conferences on leadership. Most of the leadership books and magazines on sale at international airports have little if anything to say about it. Yet the shift in values on decision making over the last half century has been seismic.

The Man Who Wouldn’t

One quote sums up the philosophy of President Harry S. Truman: “No matter how big a ranch ya’ own, or how many cows ya’ brand, the size of your funeral is still gonna depend on the weather.”

When Truman retired from office in 1952, his income consisted of little more than a U.S. Army pension, reportedly totaling just \$13,507.72 per year.

Sometime later, a report came to Congress that Truman was paying for his own stamps and personally licking them. They granted him an allowance and, eventually, an additional pension worth \$25,000 per year.

Truman had been offered some lucrative corporate positions, but he declined, stating, “You don’t want me. You want the office of the president, and that doesn’t belong to me. It belongs to the American people, and it’s not for sale.”

On May 6, 1971, as Congress prepared to award him the Medal of Honor on his 87th birthday, he refused to accept it. He wrote: “I don’t consider that I have done anything which should be the reason for any award, congressional or otherwise.”

The fact that most readers will raise their eyebrows at this just shows how low our expectations have sunk. An ex-president who refuses to capitalize on his past position, who refuses a prestigious national award? Why on earth do that?

Truman penned some enduring phrases. Among the best remembered are: “If you can’t stand the heat, get out of the kitchen,” and “The buck stops here.” His advice on winning in politics (“Always be sincere, even if you don’t mean it”) shows both a survivor’s instinct and wry poet’s wit.

But beneath the hard-boiled pragmatist one finds a man unable to stray far from his inner convictions. Given the choice between the presidency and world peace, he said once, he would choose world peace every time. The trappings of high office did not impress him. Never once did he lose sight of the fact that his life and career served a higher purpose. He refused the Medal of Honor because he knew he mattered less than the cause he served.

*Leaders without vision are like
guides without a map.*

Truman would not have described this as a vision—but that’s what it was. A person with a vision sees the bigger picture. In fact he can never *not* see the bigger picture. And that enables him to take his bearings from it even when those around him see nothing at all.

By contrast, leaders without vision are like guides without a map. Though they may come across as strong, confident, and independent, in reality they are not influencers but influencees. Titles count for nothing. Even as PhDs, chairmen, and CEOs, they blow with the wind of current fashion. Most think short-term or, at most, in a five-year time frame. They respond to situations rather than setting directions. History quickly forgets them.

Tragically, the loss of a compelling vision among leaders has trickled down from the presidency of corporations, the governorship of states, and the pulpits of churches. It corrupts even the leadership of families. The crisis, more pronounced in the West, spreads to many locales across the globe. Couples divorce rather than sort out their problems. Parents

focus too much on their own lives and careers and neglect their children. Significantly, parents talk about “managing” children, not about “leading” them.

Our world’s societies plead for leadership—in business, in education, in politics, in the home, in religion.

At all levels, our world’s societies plead for leadership—in business, in education, in politics, in the home, in religion. People know influential leadership when they see it. They mistrust elitists who talk about fairness or compassion but never match their words with action. They grow weary of quick fixes that fail to address the real issues. They see through the blandishments of power-seekers and self-publicists. Instinctively, they seem to know the world needs better leadership than that.

The prophet Ezekiel summed it up when he quoted God as saying, “I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one” (Ezekiel 22:30).

But influential leaders haven’t disappeared. And if you’ve met one you’ll remember it, because visionary decision making tends to permeate everything he does. So influential leaders will usually have:

- A generous endowment of physical and emotional energy
- A compelling purpose that drives toward a specific goal
- A mastery of the methods for achieving the aim they profess
- An ability to sustain the confidence, loyalty, and frequently the affection of those they lead
- A gift for enlisting followers to support a cause that leads to the followers’ own best interests

Tyranny Is Not Leadership

Here someone will object: “But isn’t there such a thing as bad influence?”

Yes, plenty of managers in the private and public sectors act like petty dictators. And you don’t need much history to know that a person seized with ambition can command the hysterical allegiance of the masses. Influence and vision can both exist on the dark side.

*To the extent that those in positions
of power neglect their moral
responsibilities, they fail to lead.*

But here’s the point. The tyrants, big and small, do not fully deserve the title *leader*. They may rule a department of 200 people. They may rule a political party or an entire nation. But one cannot call them leaders without heavy qualification because power and leadership are not the same thing. To the extent that those in positions of power neglect their moral responsibilities, they fail to lead.

In 1986, after years of thinking, I developed my definition of leadership:

Leadership is the discipline of deliberately exerting special influence within a group to move it toward goals of beneficial permanence that fulfill the group’s real needs.

Every word has been weighed carefully:

Leadership is the discipline... This indicates that leaders are made not born. From time to time a person may intuitively display a leadership characteristic. But that no more makes him a leader than hitting a lucky hole in one makes him a PGA champion. Even these so-called “natural leaders” will not succeed in leadership unless they work hard to perfect themselves. Influential leadership takes discipline.

...of deliberately exerting... Leadership takes conscious commitment—a commitment not to the thrill of being respected or obeyed, but to the deeper, spiritual calling of leadership. Only leaders who have this commitment will survive the times of crisis. Influential leaders stick to their task, even when they suffer the most painful reverses. Such commitment does not appear magically out of the air. To develop commitment, a leader will need deep spiritual roots. This explains why many of the greatest business leaders I know begin their board meetings with prayer and keep Bibles on their desks. I have encountered this in Japan and Fiji, in Germany and Lebanon, in Brazil and Canada, in China, on the subcontinent of India, and the great continent of Africa.

...special influence... When you exert force on others, they follow you out of fear. By contrast, a leader's authority rests upon a profound trust among his followers. They are convinced that, through him and with him, they can realize self-enriching, humanitarian, and ennobling results they would otherwise fail to attain. They do this because the leader himself displays love, humility, and self-control.

...within a group... The group may be a family, a tribe, a company, a church, a neighborhood, a union, or a nation. It may be a loose affiliation of people who share the same interest or passion for sport or educational background. Leaders always exist among, and are operative within, a group of people who share some form of shared identity and shared purpose. Indeed unity of purpose may bring the group into existence and define its goals. Political pressure groups bring together those who feel the same way about an issue, be it the protection of the environment or need for funding of medical research. Companies bring employees together under the shared goal of winning a larger market share.

...to move it toward goals... The word *goals* here has two meanings. Broadly, it refers to the leader's vision, his dream of what he sees his group being or doing. The leader's vision sets him apart and makes him a leader, and his commitment to act upon the vision

turns it into a mission. Also, however, *goals* refers to a set of specific, time-sensitive, measurable steps by which a vision and mission can find fulfillment.

...of beneficial permanence... A leader's vision should encompass changes that continue and endure for time and eternity. Clearly, such changes can be positive or negative. *Beneficial permanence*, therefore, indicates that true leadership seeks goals that are both lasting and good. Powerholders often seek to achieve goals that benefit themselves or their families or their financial backers—not on the group's behalf but at the group's expense. Such leadership quickly implodes. I find this true even within families. A parent who fails to raise a child with proper wisdom and discipline, for example, will produce results in the child's personality that are permanent but far from beneficial.

...that fulfill the group's real needs. I have written this book for those who desire to develop leadership with the dimension of beneficial permanence. To do this, the leader must have an understanding of the real needs of others. Leaders must maintain a sensitivity, a keen awareness, of the people for whom they have been given responsibility. They are attuned to their surroundings, able to assess situations thoroughly, and prepared to take action. "Fulfilling the group's real needs" is the final test of the genuineness of vision. Such influential leadership demands foresight, wisdom, and determination. In history, nations, movements, and communities have seldom desired things that represent their true best interests.

Abraham Lincoln moved the United States toward goals that fulfilled the real needs of the people—unity with freedom for all citizens—even though many people could not foresee the benefits that would flow from his actions.

For Christians, this definition of leadership has a powerful implication.

If you are a Christian believer in an unbelieving society, *you are a leader*. Let me say that again: To be a Christian in secular society is to be a leader. You may or may not occupy a leadership position in a

Christian organization or the business world. But even if you feel no special calling and hold no position of responsibility, the burden of leading others to salvation falls directly on your shoulders.

Jesus said, “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden” (Matthew 5:14). He explicitly commanded every believer to put world evangelism in a place of priority. His command applies to all believers in all ages: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19; see also Mark 16:15 and Acts 1:8).

Christians should not regard world evangelism as a hobby but as an all-consuming priority. There are many ways to carry it out. Evangelism does not just mean being a missionary or pastor. Korean educator Helen Kim, Wall Street investment banker Thomas F. Staley, German-American industrialist John Bolten, leading Brazilian jurist Benjamin Moraes—all these were leaders both in their professional fields and in the mission field.

*Christian believers understand
what it means to live for something
greater than themselves.*

When it comes to visionary decision making, Christian believers enjoy an advantage. They understand what it means to live for something greater than themselves. They have internalized the truth that “one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” (Luke 12:15).

How to Become a “Born Leader”

I am going to speak openly about my own experience. Many who knew me at the age of 13 still marvel that I ever attained leadership

status, leadership performance, and leadership recognition. As I reflect upon my early life, I'm compelled to agree with them that no one demonstrated such an absence of leadership qualities as I.

No one would have considered my looks impressive. I was short. I was sickly. At the age of three, a disease doctors could not identify nearly ended my life. I spent 14 hours a day in bed up until my early teens. Throughout my childhood, life-threatening ailments prophesied an early death. Cholera, smallpox (despite a vaccination that obviously did not take), glandular problems, and a host of other maladies necessitated stays at hospital. I lived on cod-liver oil.

At school, I stuttered and stammered like an arc light in trouble. If I got excited, people around me needed a towel and an umbrella. Not surprisingly, my voice evoked taunting from other children. Even my father, who loved me unconditionally, requested that I tone it down during his time of study. I can still hear the words, "John Edmund, I'm trying to study. Please speak more softly. Your voice pierces me like a knife blade."

As I look back on those episodes I cannot fault him. He had to prepare his sermons. Nevertheless his rebukes did not instill self-confidence.

On top of all that, my congenital shyness drove me up to my bedroom to avoid the embarrassment of meeting visitors to our home. More than once my father threatened punitive action if I did not join the visitors in our living room.

Nevertheless, by age 30 I had served some of America's outstanding congregations as senior minister. At 32, I had addressed 10,000 leaders gathered at Kiel Auditorium in Kansas City, Missouri. The address hit the front pages of America's papers from the *New York Times* to the *Los Angeles Examiner*.

In 1969 I founded a global leadership organization that has provided advanced leadership training to multiple tens of thousands. Its alumni include the world's premier leaders: senior executives, chief justices, university presidents, evangelists, bishops and archbishops, media moguls, political leaders, and parliamentarians.