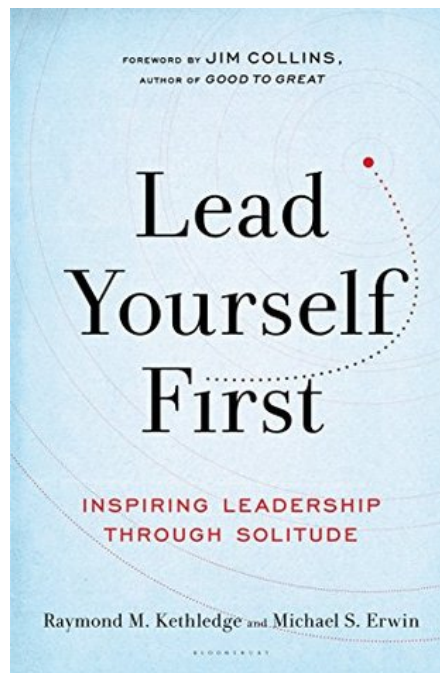




Lead Yourself First: Inspiring Leadership Through Solitude

Raymond M. Kethledge , Michael S. Erwin , James C. Collins (Introduction)

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A guide to the role of solitude in good leadership, including profiles of historical and contemporary figures who have used solitude to lead with courage, creativity, and strength.

Throughout history, leaders have used solitude as a matter of course. Eisenhower wrote memoranda to himself during World War II as a way to think through complex problems. Martin Luther King found moral courage while sitting alone at his kitchen table one night during the Montgomery bus boycott. Jane Goodall used her intuition in the jungles of Central Africa while learning how to approach chimps. Solitude is a state of mind, a space where you can focus on your own thoughts without distraction, with a power to bring mind and soul together in clear-eyed conviction. Like a great wave that saturates everything in its path, however, handheld devices and other media now leave us awash with the thoughts of others. We are losing solitude without even realizing it.

To find solitude today, a leader must make a conscious effort. This book explains why the effort is worthwhile and how to make it. Through gripping historical accounts and firsthand interviews with a wide range of contemporary leaders, Raymond Kethledge (a federal court of appeals judge) and Michael Erwin (a West Pointer and three-tour combat veteran) show how solitude can enhance clarity, spur creativity, sustain emotional balance, and generate the moral courage necessary to overcome adversity and criticism. Anyone who leads anyone—including oneself—can benefit from solitude. With a foreword by Jim Collins (author of the bestseller *Good to Great*), *Lead Yourself First* is a rallying cry to reclaim solitude—and all the benefits, both practical and sublime, that come with it.

Lead Yourself First: Inspiring Leadership Through Solitude Details

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From Reader Review Lead Yourself First: Inspiring Leadership Through Solitude for online ebook

Lori says

I was a goodreads giveaway winner of this book. I found this to be a rather unique read. It focuses on people off all walks of life who have used solitude to help solve problems. all of these are known people who have been faced with big decisions and have turned to solitude for inspiration. In this book we read about famous persons such as Martin Luther King, Jane Goodall, Eisenhower, one of the popes, and so many more who found that time alone to reflect have helped them to lead groups and help solve the issues at hand. I would give this a 3.5. Pretty interesting for the most part.

Geoff Lanotte says

I reserve the right to update this rating later. I am still chewing on it. There were great stories about how various leaders and how they used solitude. I am not so sure how all the connections were made between solitude and the various acts of the leaders. At times it felt like - person x practiced solitude, person x accomplished y, therefore you should practice solitude.

At the same time, the stories were inspiring and interesting. The author did their homework and presented many leaders in a new light. I am just not sure that it moved the point the author was trying to make.

Again, I reserve the right to update this rating after thinking about it a bit more.

Mike Gunderloy says

An excellent book focused on the importance of solitude to leaders - though that could just as well have been cast as "the importance of finding time to focus." While many leaders get that time through being away from everything (running, vacationing, or just closing the office door), others may be able to focus just by a change of setting away from the everyday noise. I'll be chewing on this one for a while, especially as I have fallen deeply into the trap of instant response to everything myself.

Noah says

This is one of the worst books I have ever attempted to read. With its title literally stolen from another book (on Goodreads, look it up), this book is unethical, biased beyond belief and akin to something megalomaniacs would come up with. Written by two (obviously) lazy govt workers, this book is chock full of typos and sentence structure errors. If it were to be graded, it would be given an F-. In summary, don't buy this book...or read it, unless you are just feeling too smart and need to dumb yourself down for the day.

Greg says

Solitude...it's something I have often sought out, on almost a daily basis. For me, it isn't a "nice to have," it's an essential part of my life. Much like exercise, I can go without solitude for a while -- a few days, maybe even a few weeks -- before too much time passes, I find myself getting grumpy, slow, and stressed. Maybe it's for that reason that I found this book so interesting. Truthfully, though, I think solitude, properly used, is something that anyone can benefit from, even those who don't think they will. Maybe especially for such people.

The book begins with a compelling argument for the importance of solitude in any leader's (or person's) life. The authors explain their ideas using personal examples as illustrations. They then proceed to a series of chapters, each of which is built around an experience or person who exemplifies one or more of the benefits of, or approaches to, solitude. I first listened to it as an audiobook, and appreciated the listen, but I will go back and read it, this time with an eye to teasing out specific lessons or ideas that will help me in my solitude.

It's a worthwhile read.

Stephen Newman says

This book surprised me. My expectations were tempered by the title which, taken alone, implies a selfish attitude towards leadership. "Lead Yourself First" isn't exactly "Officers Eat Last" after all. But it's not that at all. It's about the value of solitude, something which took me time to learn and appreciate.

As a young Marine officer I tended to buck the trend of my peers by running alone, more out of a lack of confidence in my running ability than anything else. But over time this developed into a habit. For virtually 26 years I blocked time in my calendar from 1130 to 1300 each day for "PT." By the time I was a field grade officer I recognized how valuable that alone time was to me, coming in the middle of a day that typically began before 0700 and ended after 1800. It represented a mental break from the phones, emails, and demands of my job as a Judge Advocate. It gave me time to think about the challenges of the day and "breath" in preparation for what was to come.

Such is the lesson of this book. The authors conclude with three points of their own, and you can read the book yourself to learn them. But for me, the three take aways are:

- (1). Don't be afraid to take time for yourself, but don't be selfish with that time. Apply yourself, and use it to think and recharge.
- (2). Don't be afraid to take the things you learn in your "thinking time" and try them out for size. They may not work. That's okay. It's an iterative process.
- (3). Once your thoughts have been refined, don't be afraid to be a nonconformist and/or to speak truth to power.

A good read worth your time and consideration, even if it only reinforces that which you already know.

MU says

Proposed alternative title for this book: Fundamentals of Leadership. The authors prove through the accounts they illustrate from history, military, politics, business, non-profit, and social movements that leadership requires lots of self-knowledge and reflection, and the best way to do that is through solitude. Remaining connected without thinking about the real issues is not playing your role as leader. The book also provides some practical and useful tips on how to create time, space, and suitable approaches for reflection without distractions. I think it should be the first book to read about leadership.

Lance Cahill says

I am not a big fan of leadership books. I bought this book because one of the co-authors is a rumored SCOTUS possibility. That being said, I did enjoy this book. It's a generous four stars due to that context.

Anyone in a managerial-level position can ultimately agree with the premise of this book- that reducing stimuli will allow for clearer thinking.

The historical examples are interesting and the book is very well-written, with the section on John Paul II being my favorite, though the connection to solitude is not clearly established in my view.

Mark Steed says

Lead Yourself First has an important message: we need solitude if we are to be effective leaders. Solitude provides the space that allows leaders
to be analytical
to be intuitive
to be creative, and
to find moral courage.

Most importantly solitude allows leaders time to develop the core principles or underlying values that ground one's leadership and serve as a source of strength and direction when times are tough. Times of solitude can be found in any number of ways: on a long walk or run; in a library; or through writing a journal or daily meditation.

Today's leaders face greater pressures because of the "always-on" culture that comes with new technologies. This makes finding solitude all the more important.

"Society did not make a considered choice to surrender the bulk of its time for reflection in favour of time spent reading tweets or texts." (p.181)

The highlight of the book for me were the insights on leadership by Doug Contant, formerly President and CEO of the Campbell Soup Group:

"Leaders need to work on personal leadership as well as organisational leadership."

"Leadership is an inside-out process - you need to be fortified within before you can lead people around you." (p.131)

I particularly liked the idea that Contant spends 30 minutes each morning thinking about five things:

My family

My work

My community

My faith

My personal well-being.

The authors suggest a number of important ways to embrace solitude.

Reset expectations: find the balance between accessibility and distance: try putting in the calendar "time to think" each day and "no-meeting days";

Find Space for solitude: get away from your computer and leave your phone behind.

Prepare for solitude: "percolate beforehand" identifying issues to consider in advance.

Prepare emotionally: "Solitude brings one closer to the truth and sometimes the truth is discomforting."

Embrace hard thinking: think about complex problems.

Identify your first principles and stay connected with them. Be an authentic leader.

Find a higher purpose for your leadership and share it with your followers.

Review

Overall, Lead Yourself First is a much needed reminder that leaders need to take time to reflect and ground themselves in order to do their job more effectively and in that sense it is a worthwhile read. The authors are at their best when they are analysing the issue and offering practical advice (as in the paragraph above).

However, where Lead Yourself First falls down is that the subject doesn't warrant a full book. As a consequence, the authors draw on numerous examples to illustrate its simple message. A further deficiency is that far too many of these are taken from military history (Eisenhower, TE Lawrence, General Mathis, Platoon Commander Katie Simonis, Lincoln, Hooker and Grant to mention a few). At times I felt I was reading the edited highlights of the West Point Reading List combined with the collected anecdotes from contacts made during the authors' military service. Often the length of the narrative (especially the detailed descriptions of battle scenarios) was often well out of proportion with the point that was being illustrated. In what felt like padding (and a deliberate counterblast to the military perspective) the book draws to a close with three extended historical examples of moral courage: Churchill, Martin Luther-King and Karol Woytyla (Pope John-Paul II), without much application to the book's themes.

Having said that, many of the examples were interesting in their own right - it was an unexpected pleasure to fill in some gaps in my knowledge of the US Civil War and of C20 History - but I did not think that the authors worked hard enough to draw out the lessons of their many examples to further their argument about leadership in a significant way.

Mark Youngkin says

What a disappointment this book was.

Kethledge and Erwin start with a promising thesis: that it's essential for leaders to unplug from interaction with others and spend time in solitary contemplation. That thesis is then wasted on a series of unrelated historical vignettes with little to tie them together but, "and at one point during this situation, our hero was alone!" It seems like a good point for a series of historical profiles, but not for a (somehow much-lauded) leadership text.

I've given an extra star for eight pages at the end in which Kethledge and Ervin talk about **how** and **why** to pursue solitude. The book would have been much better if they'd started with that, an expanded on it. A book on why leaders should be alone and how to do it would be worthy of great acclaim. Do yourself a favor; borrow a copy of this book from someone suckered into buying it, copy the last eight pages and learn from them. You'll save a lot of time and gain all of this volume's insight.

Jay Hennessey says

Super interesting leadership book, outlining historic leaders use of solitude as a way to solve problems, remain grounded, deal with setbacks, make tough decisions and ultimately continue to present the best form of themselves.

The authors introduce their framework early on as qualitative vs quantitative - so I was immediately intrigued at learning the stories. To that end, I was not disappointed, from Churchill to MLK, to Pope John Paul, to Jane Goodall, the authors share stories of each leader's struggles and success and their methodology for resiliency.

Overall, while the stories continued to be fascinating, and really made me want to learn more about each leader, the concept of solitude (meditation, journaling, quite time alone, whitespace to just think) did not really change throughout the course of the book. Still, I thoroughly enjoyed all of the stories and looked forward to each new chapter.

In the end, this book offers great stories that reinforce the importance of solitude for leaders at every level and shares some prescriptive thoughts on how to incorporate or remove these practices into and from one's personal routine:

- Build time into one's daily schedule to think / meditate / ruminate
- Resist the urge to stay "plugged in" 24/7. Many great points on why and how to limit electronic connections (text, email, calls)
- Modeling behaviors for subordinate. Illustrate that certain times you are "off the grid" (hours of the day, Sundays, etc)

I recommend this book for leaders at every level - it is a great reminder to continuously calibrate your routine and allow time for solitude.

Eric says

This is one of the best leadership books I've read, definitely in my top 10, if not the top 5. In today's busy world where connectedness and few boundaries separating the many facets of our lives exist, the concept of purposeful solitude, where one actively works to examine and develop solutions to problematic situations is rare. Yet, the authors provide numerous examples (Lincoln, Grant, MLK Jr., Pope John Paul II), of how they used different types of solitude to overcome their situations and provide meaningful leadership.

I recommend many books, but this is the one I will probably be buying for others as gifts.

Philip Harris says

A great read for anyone who has not discovered the powerful benefits of finding solitude in a hectic world. Having two small kids, a working wife, and an extremely hectic job myself, I really found a lot of value in what the authors were preaching. In particular, I really enjoyed how the authors use historical examples such as Winton Churchill, Eisenhower, and MLK to drive the point home. My life isn't nearly as dramatic as that, but it really helped drive home how vital solitude can be to mental regeneration and creative thought. I wouldn't say its a complaint, but my own issue with the book is that for someone like me who already realized and strives for moments of solitude, there were sections that were a little "preachin to the choir" for me, but overall I was never bored or unengaged in the book.

Diana Durrill says

Wow! This book was so good, so thought-provoking! A good dose of fascinating history lessons mixed in with practical advice for those of us living in this Information Age, Lead Yourself First reminds the reader that "A leader has not only permission, but a responsibility to seek out periods of solitude." (As in daily). "Solitude is not the reward for great leadership. It's the path to great leadership." Moms, dads, student-leaders, administrative, corporate, political, pastoral, you name it...it'll be helpful!

Chris says

Really solid book that blends research with illustrative examples from history and actionable insights. The examples were military-heavy: although they were extremely well written there get to be like long history lessons. They do tie in with the theme of the chapter, and serve their purpose. I just wish there were some more examples like the incredible closing chapters featuring MLK and Pope JP II.
