

TRANSFORMING LEADERSHIP: A NEW
PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS
JAMES MACGREGORY BURNS
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It's hard to improve upon a classic.

Twenty-five years ago, James MacGregor Burns published a seminal volume on Leadership that has been widely acclaimed by leaders and scholars for over two decades. With his new volume, *Burns* challenges both readers and the general field of leadership to sharpen their thinking about the nature of leadership that leads to substantive and lasting change.

Why has Burns written this text now? It appears that he is disappointed that, "aside from some modest testing and tinkering," psychologists and other scholars interested in leadership and in the work of Abraham Maslow have not explored further the relationship between self-actualization and the motivation for leadership that was at the heart of his previous text on Leadership (143). In that text, he stressed that leaders and followers together pursue self-actualization--in this text, he emphasizes the degree to which effective leadership leads to mutual actualization that is motivated by commitment to a value of purpose that stands higher than the person.

Structurally, *Transforming Leadership* is comprised of five parts: Change, Leaders, Leadership, People, and Transformation. Bracketing these five parts are a three-page prologue that calls for "the protection and nourishing of happiness, for extending the opportunity to pursue happiness to all people, as the core agenda of transforming leadership" (3) and a ten-page epilogue that names a test of the applicability of transforming leadership as that of confronting the largest, most intractable problem facing humanity in the twenty-first

century: the basic wants of the poor (231).

Contextually, Burns writes as a political historian, using as examples men and women from various generations and cultures as the experiential basis from which he offers well-formed perspectives and keen insights about leadership. Included in his exploration of leaders are such figures as Karl Marx, Elizabeth I, Woodrow Wilson, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Napoleon Bonaparte, Franklin Roosevelt, and Mohandas Gandhi. And events such as the framing and development of the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution, the French Revolution, the planning and building of the Suez and Panama Canals, and the creation of political parties in the United States, England, and the Soviet Union. Even the non-historian will find his selection and method of working with this material engaging!

Conceptually, this text identifies a number of dimensions of transforming leadership that define the heart of the text and its contributions to the study and practice of leadership. This review will limit this number to four.

First, Burns articulates a fundamental difference between transactional leadership and transformational leadership. As the "basic, daily stuff of politics," transactional leadership reflects the practical, give-and-take leadership in which the leader functions as a broker and the pursuit of change typically occurs in measured and often reluctant doses (23, 24). Transformational leadership, by contrast, implies basic alterations in entire systems. In a transformational process, "leaders take the initiative in mobilizing people for participation in the processes of change, encouraging a sense of collective identity and collective efficacy, which in turn brings stronger feelings of self-worth and self-efficacy" (25). Too often, transactional leadership is seemingly confused for transformational leadership, whether because of the manner in which transactional leadership is packaged or due to the resistance within systems in the face of the fundamental change of leadership that is truly transforming.

Second, Burns asserts that transformational leadership is intimately linked to conflict in light of the shifts that naturally happen in the midst of transformational change. Such conflict may emerge in the midst of competing needs, conflicting values, or powerful personalities-whatever the case, it is conflict

that sparks transforming leadership and galvanizes leaders and followers in the pursuit of change. To Burns, conflict is the crucial source of leadership that achieves intended, comprehensive, and lasting change. Accordingly, the analysis of conflict may be the key to opening up crucial dimensions of leadership, especially as conflict begins "in the never-ending struggle among individuals and groups for greater shares of scarce resources, that is, for satisfying material wants" (91).

Third, Burns identifies a complexity of roles in the relations of leaders and followers. The relationship, which seems so simple at first (leaders lead, followers follow) is much more complex upon reflection. Given the different roles people play in different contexts, he poses the Burns Paradox: If leadership and followership are so intertwined and fluid, how do we distinguish conceptually between leaders and followers? (171) Suggesting that the resolution of this paradox lies initially "in the distinction between persons with unrealized wants, unexpressed attitudes, and underlying predispositions, on one hand, and, on the other, persons with strong motivations to initiate an action relevant to those with such wants" (172), Burns posits that the paradox disappears if we see the whole process as a system in which the actors subsequently move in and out of leader and follower roles. At that point, we are no longer seeing individual leaders but leadership as the basic process of social change.

Fourth, Burns describes a process of mutual empowerment in which leadership (not leaders) empowers followers by intensifying their motivations-nurturing self-efficacy and collective efficacy, fusing "self" and substantive motivations, framing needs, grievances, aspirations, conflicts, and goals in terms of values-and empowers leaders who want to be heard, to have their ideas accepted and their leadership acknowledged (183, 184). Such mutual empowerment facilitates mutual self-actualization, which reflects "the transforming impact people have on one another" and serves as the crucial dynamic in a leadership process (144).

It's hard to improve upon a classic-in *Transforming Leadership*, James MacGregor Burns has done just that. His attention to the relationships of leaders and followers, of leadership to change, of wants and needs to values, of individuals to systems, and of actions to processes provide much food

for thought in a culture that typically prefers transaction to transformation. As such, this text is a must-read for scholars in the field of leadership and for those who are in, or aspire to be in, leadership roles. Especially transforming roles ...

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