

BOOK REVIEW***UNLOCKING LEADERSHIP MINDTRAPS: HOW TO THRIVE IN COMPLEXITY***

BY: JENNIFER GARVEY BERGER

Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019

148 pp. paperback

ISBN 978-1-5036-0901-3

Jennifer Garvey Berger, founding partner and CEO of Cultivating Leadership, invites us to reshape our human tendencies from responding to a world that no longer exists to addressing volatile, complex, uncertain, ambiguous (VUCA) global and local contexts. In her book, *Unlocking Leadership Mindtraps*, Garvey Berger introduces five “mindtraps” that hold us hostage, followed by practical suggestions to release ourselves from these traps. She ultimately invites us to pay attention to an overarching ladder to escape falling into mindtraps in the first place.

The first mindtrap describes how human beings create “simple stories,” reminiscent of “The Danger of the Single Story.” For Garvey Berger, the simple story we tell ourselves is a way of making meaning out of complexity and randomness. We attempt to create a story of sequence, with a beginning, middle, and end, that has cause and effect embedded in it. We project our past onto the story so that we can make sense of it, compartmentalize success and failure, and select data to support our biases. To self-correct and find our way out of this trap, we ask a key question and work toward a key habit. A paraphrase of the question goes like this: “How do I make a character in the story a hero (when originally I made her a perpetrator)?” The key habit is to entertain at least three possible stories by acknowledging several possibilities about circumstances and people involved.

The second trap is called “rightness.” The felt experience of our opinions tells us that our thinking is correct. To live in rightness is to close off curiosity and openness to data that might prove us

wrong. Defensiveness and over-confidence accompany rightness, and attention only absorbs self-reinforcing data. The key questions for finding a way out of this mindtrap are “What do I believe?” and “How could I be wrong?” The key habit is to listen to learn (versus listen to win).

Third, we can be trapped by “agreement.” Agreement often promotes a sense of connection and bonhomie, which paints concurrence as a virtue. The problem with a culture of agreement is that dissenting views are unwelcome. Garvey Berger claims that if we cannot agree, we try to compromise; if we cannot compromise, we polarize. None of these behaviors deepen relationship or lead to the best solutions amid complexity. Understanding conflict as a way to deepen relationship and approaching disagreement as a way to broaden our thinking, creates a culture of learning with greater chances of sustainable connection. The key question here is “Could this conflict serve to deepen a relationship?”. The habit is to expand possibilities because choices usually are not simple.

The fourth mindtrap brings us to “control.” Control, or being in charge, diminishes influence. Paradoxically, we often think control is the secret to success. Control connects to the simple story and rightness. For example, emphasizing measured outcomes (e.g., analysis of a hospital stay or effectiveness of a curriculum) is one way to control parts of a system with quick fixes if one cannot control the whole system. To shift this control mindtrap, we need to think about influence instead. Garvey Berger asks these questions to move us in this direction: “What could I enable? What could enable me?” The key habit invites experimentation at the edges of a project, idea, or group to alter patterns rather than outcomes.

The fifth trap is “ego.” Garvey Berger states that we often believe that we have grown and changed over time, but we are presently at the pinnacle of our development. Therefore, we guard our identity, status, and reputation carefully to keep it fixed in the here and now. She discusses the socialized, self-authored, and transforming forms of mind as part of human development, claiming that the ego can get stuck in self-authoring. A transforming mind looks for the next possibility rather than attempting to retain the status quo. The key

question is “Who do I want to be next?” and the key habit is to listen to learn from oneself with ongoing internal questions.

The final chapter acknowledges that previous chapters were designed to teach escapes from mindtraps. Here, Garvey Berger invites a connection to our purpose, our bodies, our emotions, and self-compassion accompanied by compassion for others that help us stay out of mindtraps in the first place. She provides a description about how to build each rung of this ladder to connect to vital parts of our best selves and to connect in an open way with others.

Unlocking Leadership Mindtraps is one of my chosen texts for leadership courses I currently teach for clergy continuing education, business leaders, and in seminaries. Garvey Berger takes us beyond the Adaptive Leadership mindset (Heifetz and Linsky) into the increasingly VUCA world, and invites us to self-examine our unconscious biases, tendencies, and even our training to become relational leaders who not only adapt but create networks of possibility for the future of business, non-profits, and religious organizations alike.

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