

Graduate College of Management

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Book review: J Adair 2005, The
inspirational leader: how to motivate,
encourage and achieve success

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This book was first published in 2003 and is now published as a paperback edition. John Adair, being one of the most well-known authorities on leadership, continues to inspire leaders with his simple, but thought-provoking, messages about the nature of people. In this book, Adair uses actual conversations and discussions over some months between an executive and himself to explore the nature of leadership and its practice in organisational settings.

Commencing with some general principles of leadership, the conversation extends to particular issues and problems being encountered by the executive in his quest to become a more effective leader. Chapters of the book are therefore developed around each of the issues raised in the conversation. Famous quotations and sayings are used in conjunction with key points to assist the reader to reflect on their own understanding of leadership and its practice.

What I took from reading this book is that leadership is a very personal phenomenon that is almost always context-specific and situational. There is no one simple style or formula that leaders can adopt to ensure effective leadership of others, and each leader needs to examine who they are and what they are aiming to achieve in order to develop.

Unfortunately, it is known that leaders spend very little time examining their own styles and performance and often believe that, as they have already achieved a leadership role or have been successful to now, they are above improvement and have no need to develop their leadership effectiveness further.

While formal leadership development programmes used by organisations remain the dominant focus for leadership development, research has confirmed that leaders appear to learn best through informal life and work experiences. This book is therefore useful in assisting leaders to examine their own problems and issues by learning vicariously, that is learning about leadership by reading about other leaders, their issues and problems. Therefore, reading about the lives of other leaders is a good way of improving your own leadership.

One of the philosophies about leadership that underpins the book is that becoming a leader in an organisation is a privilege, but this privilege comes with certain obligations. A prime obligation is that leaders are morally obliged to serve first the organisation and its people rather than their own self interests.

If you aspire to be a more effective leader or just want some practical tips on how leaders are dealing with the issues that emerge in daily organisational life, then Adair's book and insights will be a useful addition to your leadership library collection.