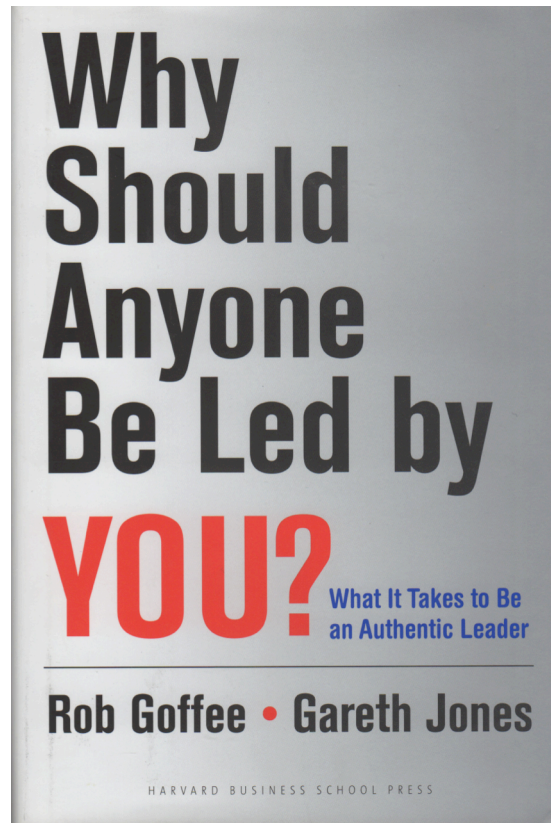

BOOK REVIEW

**"Why Should Anyone be Led by You?
What it takes to be an Authentic Leader"
by Robert Goffee & Gareth Jones**

Harvard Business Review Press, 1995
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This book takes a different slant on the age-old question of what it takes to be a great leader. The authors resist the trend to provide a tried-and-true formula or focus on a particular skill or leadership technique. And unlike many feel-good leadership guides, they focus on authentic leadership as opposed to how to manage others effectively.

In 2006 when *Why Should Anyone Be Led by YOU?: What It Takes to be an Authentic Leader* was written, authors Robert Goffee and Gareth Jones were both academics at the London Business School and past corporate leaders. Goffee's expertise is in organizational behavior while Jones' is in management development. After publishing a

well-received article in the Harvard Business Review in 2000 also titled *Why Should Anyone Be Led by YOU?*, they partnered in a consulting business called Creative Management Associates, helping leading organizations with corporate culture, organizational design, and leadership development.

The main premise of the book is that leadership is contextual and that one recipe does not fit all organizational situations. Followers, whether at work, in families, in churches, or in communities, respond best to leaders who are authentically themselves rather than being clones of a particular leadership style or philosophy. They feel that aspiring leaders should not model themselves on a leader they wish to emulate but rather use their experience to leverage their skills with their personality and the specific context in which they are leading.

While emphasizing the complexities of leadership, the three key skills the authors showcase are:

- 1) Knowing yourself
- 2) Balancing particular aspects of relations with followers
- 3) Engaging in “situational sensing”

And the four qualities of effective leaders they explore are:

- 1) Selectively exposing your weaknesses and vulnerabilities to show that you are human
- 2) Relying on intuition to gauge the appropriate timing of your actions
- 3) Managing others with “tough empathy”
- 4) Revealing and capitalizing on your unique qualities

But they caution that none of these skills and qualities can be applied in a mechanical way if you want to be seen as an authentic leader, and that leadership is a *social* science rather than a technical one.

The chapter titles give you a good idea of the themes of the book:

- 1) Be Yourself – More – with Skill
- 2) Know and Show Yourself – Enough
- 3) Take Personal Risks
- 4) Read – and Rewrite – the Context
- 5) Remain Authentic – but Conform Enough
- 6) Manage Social Distance
- 7) Communicate – with Care
- 8) Authentic Followership
- 9) The Price and Prize of leadership

Situation sensing is one of the more interesting concepts in the book. While stressing that being yourself is key to being a good leader, the authors encourage altering your

behavior and style to fit different contexts, developing sensory and cognitive skills for reading different situations, and being sensitive to what is needed in each situational context. You should be able to show emotion in some situations, but be more stoical in others; to grow close personal relationships with followers while knowing when to remain distant; to conform to your organization's culture when appropriate and maintain your individuality when appropriate. Having a chameleon-like ability to fit your personality to others' can be a strength rather than an indication of reticence.

Situational sensing also applies to practicalities like using others' traits to their best advantage. If someone is a cheerleader-type, you don't want to set them up doing solitary work isolated from others. If communication channels favor giving directives in large meetings, you don't want to micromanage and choose one-on-one strategies.

It applies particularly to coming into a new position. Timing is everything in earning your followers' trust and allegiance. Start slow, learning about the existing culture, ask questions, and listen before imposing your management style in a new setting. Coming in like a storm trooper will not win you a loyal following; simply timing your innovations with sensitivity to the status quo is much more productive.

Another key idea is not to try to be perfect. Followers don't relate to people who sport a perfectionist front, and they are likely to see you as insincere or phony. A weakness such as not being able to recall figures can be seen as endearing if you admit to it and address it lightheartedly.

And you don't actually have to be liked as a leader to be respected – respect being the preferred status. Emphasizing perfect results from followers is often antithetical to an effective, authentic leadership style. Having clear self-awareness might be seen as the key ingredient to being a great leader. Knowing what works for you rather than trying to emulate someone else or model a particular style shows followers that you are authentic and trustworthy.

People respond best to a genuine human being, not a robotic set of leadership traits. We want to follow those who demonstrate that they have the same humanity, values, and vulnerabilities that we do. Someone who can creatively balance the demands of leadership with these human characteristics can be successful as a leader.

Goffee and Jones contribute many years of research and experience to *Why Should Anyone Be Led by YOU?* They provide lots of case studies to make the book interesting and back up their findings. It sometimes reads like a textbook, but is full of practical suggestions and avoids fluff and the motivational content of many self-help books on leadership. I think this is a visionary and valuable book for aspiring leaders.

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