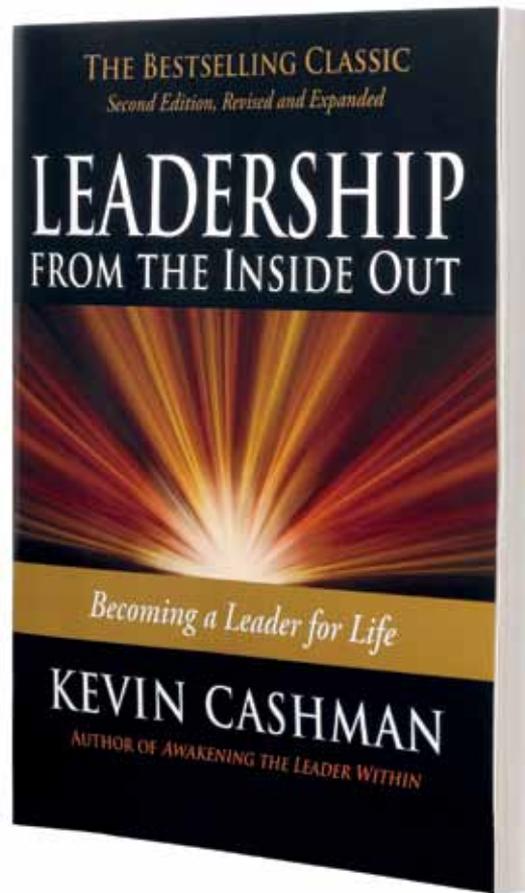


Becoming an Authentic Leader

“Leadership from the Inside Out: Becoming a Leader for Life,” by Kevin Cashman (Berrett-Koehler Publishers)

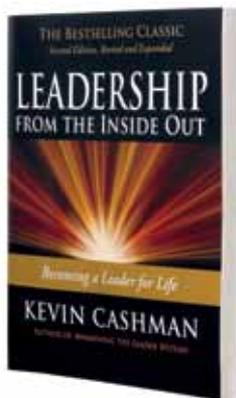
The best leaders start by evaluating their own strengths and weaknesses



In 1998, when the leadership development guru Kevin Cashman first published his seminal work, “Leadership from the Inside Out: Becoming a Leader for Life,” the business landscape had a decidedly different look and feel. With a new millennium looming, the tough-minded Jack Welch, the legendary chief executive at General Electric, was the reigning leadership icon in Corporate America. His success running G.E. made him a mythic figure and solidified the image of the CEO willing to “cowboy up” to any challenge.

Back then, books about leadership were generally given a lukewarm embrace, while the best-seller lists were dominated by tomes touting a coming economic boom or offering financial advice. A technology-fueled surge in the economy raised stock prices, filled corporate coffers and rewarded senior executives with outlandish compensation packages. Business leaders felt entitled and empowered and were generally uninterested in self-actualization regimens. But change was on the horizon, and a few visionary consultants and academic voices such as Peter Drucker, Warren Bennis and John Kotter were touting the importance of the examined life of the corporate leader.

At the time, “Leadership from the Inside Out” was a contemporary complement to Peter Senge’s “The Fifth Discipline,” Kotter’s “Leading Change,” and Daniel Goleman’s



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“Emotional Intelligence.” The book tapped into a nascent urge to look beyond the accepted command-and-control top-down leadership style to identify the “soft skills” required of new millennium leadership. Cashman, the founder and president of LeaderSource, a consultancy focusing on leadership development, executive coaching and talent management (now part of Korn/Ferry International), has spent 30 years coaching thousands of senior executives seeking ways to enhance performance and master the essence of leadership.

By the time Cashman published a 10th-anniversary edition of his best-selling book in 2008, which includes new research from Korn/Ferry International, Lominger, and researchers Daniel Goleman, Jim Collins, Jack Zenger and Joseph Folkman, among others, a global recession was gathering steam, Wall Street was in tattered disarray and the dearth of potent leadership in American companies was startling. Ironically, despite these tectonic changes — or perhaps because of them — “Leadership from the Inside Out” remains as relevant and instructive today as it was at the time of its debut. The book’s premise is simple but compelling: there is a powerful connection between our internal selves and our external results. Prospective leaders must seek personal mastery through self-awareness, authenticity, courage and purpose in order to successfully lead their organizations.

“Leadership is not simply something we do,” Cashman writes. “It comes from a deeper reality within us; it comes from our values, principles, life experiences and essence. Leadership is a process, an intimate expression of who we are.”

The foundation of Cashman’s thesis is authenticity, which he defines as “the continual process of building self-awareness of our whole person — strengths and limitations.” In order to support sustainable leadership, authenticity may be the single most important principle. Unfortunately, most people, especially executives, have little realization of the lack of authenticity in their lives and the crucial role it plays. Cashman notes that in three decades of work, he has never had a single executive come to him complaining of a lack of authenticity.

And he asks: “If authenticity is so impor-

tant, why don’t we recognize it as an issue? The answer is both simple and profound: *We are always authentic to our present state of development.* We all behave in perfect alignment with our current level of emotional, psychological and spiritual evolution. All our actions and relationships, as well as the quality and power of our leadership, accurately express the person we have become. Therefore, we conclude that we are “authentic.”

“There is a big hitch, however,” he continues. “*While we are true and authentic to our current state of development, we are inauthentic to our potential state of development.*” In other words, leaders are severely limited by their own shortsighted view of how they can achieve significant levels of growth and improvement. Caught up in the daily machinations of a corporate entity, they neglect the future for the present and become trapped.

Given the complexities and intense demands on leaders in the current economic maelstrom, it is the rare executive who seeks his or her own inner light. “Leadership from the Inside Out” is less prescriptive than educational. Cashman ends each chapter of the book with Reflections, a workbook section for executives in which they can pose critical questions for themselves from material in the chapter, such as: “Under what conditions do you shut down communication? What beliefs are causing you to shut down? How can you be more open in future situations?”

There is no denying the provocative impact that Cashman’s insights trigger, particularly in an era of outlandish CEO compensation, a steady parade of corporate malfeasance and the very real damage leaders have wrought on our economy.

“It is no longer possible to discount these principles as soft,” Cashman writes, explaining the reason for an updated version of the book. “They produce measurable results, and they are essential to substantial leadership, team and organizational success.”

It is the rare organization that pays more than lip service to the idea that its people are its most valuable asset. But for Cashman, the payoff is tangible. “Organizations that invest as proactively in people development as they do in business development will thrive for decades to come,” he writes. ✍