

# SUMMARY

## TURN THE SHIP AROUND!

L. DAVID MARQUET



# **Summary of "Turn the Ship Around" by L. David Marquet**

Written by Alyssa Burnette

If you've ever found yourself wondering how to motivate a group of people who just don't care or you'd simply like to improve your own leadership qualities, Turn the Ship Around (2013) is just the book for you!

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# Introduction

If you're a manager, you already know the value of improving your leadership skills. By this point in your career, you've probably attended a thousand motivational speeches, workshops, and team-building exercises designed to strengthen your management skills and improve your team's trust in your leadership. But what if you find yourself getting into a rut? It can happen to any manager at any time and that's okay; the trick is just knowing how to get out of it and become the most effective leader you can be. And that's exactly what we're going to learn in this summary! So, through these chapters, you'll discover:

- Why the leadership style that built the Pyramids is outdated
- Why good leadership is predicated on inspiring the next generation of leaders and
- Why briefings don't inspire people

# There is a Leadership Crisis in the United States

Let's be honest: do you really like your job? It's okay if you don't; this book isn't going to judge you. Because you're actually not alone. In fact, job satisfaction in the United States is currently at an all-time low. A study conducted between 2004 and 2012 showed that, during this eight-year period, less than half of US employees considered themselves to be happy with their jobs. Similarly, a Conference Board Survey from 2009 discovered that worker satisfaction had plunged to an all-time low during this year in particular. And as you might imagine, worker dissatisfaction can lead to a host of other problems.

Lack of productivity is one of the big ones because, understandably, if people aren't happy at work, they're not exactly motivated to do their best or be their most productive. As a matter of fact, recent studies indicate that in the United States alone, companies have lost over \$300 billion dollars as a result of productivity issues. Surprisingly, the circumstances are just as grim for those who are unemployed; up until 2011, the United States' employment rate remained at a consistent 9% for a record of 31 months. Now, I think we can all agree that these statistics are pretty bad. But they're also indicative of a much bigger problem, and to understand why we're really facing all these difficulties, we have to go the root of the matter.

Marquet posits that the problem lies in our pre-existing methods of leadership and argues that we can trace this flaw back to Ancient Egypt and the Industrial Revolution. Marquet calls this style of leadership the "leader-follower approach," and it functions exactly like how it sounds. Under this model, decisions are made by one person-- the boss-- and expected to be carried out by the followers (or employees). This style of leadership leaves no room for democracy or individual freedom of expression, and although it can be well-suited to jobs requiring physical labor, it's not a good model for all types of work across the board.

That's because following a singular task set by someone you trust is great when you have a lot of menial tasks that need to be delegated across an assembly line of people so you can increase efficiency and complete a common goal. But in jobs which require a lot of cognitive functions and decision-making, a leader-follower mentality mostly just feels oppressive. So far from stimulating productivity and creative problem-solving, it actually prevents it! So, if we want to truly empower our workers in today's world, we need to throw away outdated models of leadership and learn how to connect with our employees.

# A Leader-Leader Approach

So, if a leader-follower mentality isn't a good idea, what's the alternative? A leader-leader approach might sound counterproductive, as if you're inviting too many cooks into the kitchen, but it can actually be more beneficial than you think! That's because this approach recognizes that leadership isn't a magical quality that's only bestowed on a chosen few. Rather, a leader-leader model invites us to recognize the unique leadership qualities that are present in each of us! One of the primary differences in this system can be observed through the way that decisions are made. Rather than simply following a decision made by one person, the power to make decisions is spread evenly throughout the entire department, allowing each individual to act on new information.

An even distribution of information also means that you have access to a broad skill-set, which can allow the best person for the job to make the most beneficial decision. This opportunity isn't always available under a leader-follower model because often, the person who has been assigned a task might not be the best fit for that particular job. But when you open your decision-making process to incorporate everyone's strengths and talents, the right person has the opportunity to solve a problem safely and in the most beneficial way. To consider how this plays out in practice, let's take a look at an example. Say a navigator notices that his submarine is off course and drifting into shallow water. Under a leader-follower system, he would first have to alert his commander and see what he wanted to do about the problem. But when you follow a leader-leader model, that navigator is empowered to jump into action and solve the problem himself.

Sounds pretty great, right? But the best part is that it's not just an example; the author actually experienced it firsthand when he took control of a navy submarine named the USS Santa Fe. Prior to his involvement, the Santa Fe was known for its deplorable performance and abysmal crew retention rates. But once Marquet took command and employed the leader-leader strategy, he took the Santa Fe from the lowest-performing sub in the fleet to



an example others looked up to. Under his command, tactical effectiveness advanced from “below average” to scoring in the “above average to excellent” range during inspections. Over 36 crew members voluntarily re-inlisted, and the USS Santa Fe was even awarded the Arleigh Burke trophy for “Most Improved Ship in the Fleet,” all because Marquet’s focus was on inspiring his crew.

# Empower Your Employees Through Extra Responsibility

By now, we can see the incredible benefits that come from pursuing a leader-leader strategy of management. So, now let's take a look at how we can put it into practice. Perhaps the most important starting point is re-writing the basic foundations of your organization. You can start doing that by re-evaluating your mission. Because if your core values don't center around making your employees feel valued and empowered, you're not going to go very far in your success. So, as you attempt to re-write your company's DNA, make sure that the first step you take involves cultivating a sustainable method for including your employees in company decision-making. However, it's important to know that this can only be achieved by relinquishing some of your own managerial authority. Although it might be a bit uncomfortable at first, it's the only way you can achieve lasting social change.

Marquet learned that firsthand when he took command of the Santa Fe, because one of the first steps he took was to delegate some of the power which was normally reserved for captains like himself to the chiefs who were responsible for each division of the submarine. And before he did anything else, he first spent time getting to know each of the chiefs and learning what he could do to empower them. As he got to know them, one of the first things he learned was that the chiefs craved more responsibility. They felt stifled by the leader-follower mentality and all they really wanted was the ability to better serve their crew. And as Marquet probed deeper into their sense of dissatisfaction, he learned that one of the primary issues they struggled with was the matter of approving leave time.

Under their previous system of management, approving leave time involved the chiefs signing off on a crew member's application for leave, and then sending this application off to be circulated amongst three different higher-ranking officers, along with a department head and an executive officer. This unnecessary and inefficient system caused a lot of complications, but

certainly one of the worst was its ability to undermine the chiefs' authority and confidence. Although approving leave time comprised only a small portion of their duties, the inability to do so on their own made them feel powerless in their own jobs. Marquet recognized this right away and immediately abolished the old system, giving his chiefs the extra responsibility they craved. This in turn restored their confidence and their satisfaction with their roles, which inspired them to be more efficient and more enthusiastic about maintaining morale among their crew.

So, through this example, you can see the benefits of reassigning responsibility for your employees. However, turning your ship around isn't something that can be achieved in one step. Some additional methods can generate amazing results as well and one that worked especially well for the crew of the Santa Fe was the invocation of a three-word phrase. Marquet used this phrase to actively involve every member of the crew in decisions about running the submarine and that phrase was the very simple, "I intend to..." By altering the language that was used to control decision-making, Marquet took away the restrictive power dynamics which were often at play.

For example, instead of a navigator having to formally request permission to change course, he could simply run his decision by the captain by saying, "I intend to alter our course." Marquet could then respond, "Go ahead." In so doing, Marquet could still maintain his authority as captain and ensure that decisions were being presented for his approval, but he could also affirm and validate his crew by allowing them to initiate decisions. As you can see from this example, adopting a leader-leader model of management can achieve highly beneficial results through implementing just a few simple changes. However, these steps are only what's necessary to jumpstart this dynamic. To maintain it, we have to employ a few more strategies.

# Delegate Responsibility Appropriately

So far, you've probably picked up on the fact that giving your employees extra responsibility is one of the most important things you can do when it comes to making them feel appreciated. But it's also important to remember that doing so is a risk. Although a promotion is always guaranteed to be empowering, as a manager, you need to feel certain that your employee is capable enough to handle the responsibility that comes with that new, empowering opportunity. So, how can we be sure they'll handle it well? The good news is that there are a number of practical mechanisms you can apply in your workforce to ensure that your employees are operating at the appropriate competence levels. One of the best steps is called "taking deliberate action."

For example, in one instance on the USS Santa Fe, a crewmember shut off a circuit breaker too early. This was a breach of protocol and the crewmember knew it, but Marquet still had to ensure that this situation wouldn't be repeated. In assessing the situation, he determined that additional training wasn't needed; the offending crewmember was already aware of what he had done and why it was wrong. He didn't need more supervision because Marquet already had the appropriate levels of thorough supervision in place. By taking time to get to the root of the problem, he learned that the real issue was a lack of attention; if the crewmember in question had been paying enough attention, he could have avoided this mistake.

So, to combat the issue, Marquet implemented a new policy of taking deliberate action. This meant that the crew would now pause, articulate what they were doing, and gesture to what they were doing before they did it. Whether they were doing something as small as turning a valve or something as significant as changing course, this pattern of deliberate action reduced errors in any situation because it introduced a system of effective accountability. Because it allowed other crewmembers to observe a problem and call attention to it before it even happened, the crew was able

to support each other and prevent mistakes. This system proved to not only be effective in their day-to-day running of the sub, it also helped the USS Santa Fe to receive the highest grade ever given on nuclear-reactor operations inspections.

However, this wasn't the only new practice that influenced their success. Marquet also introduced another major shift in management that redirected the focus of meetings from "briefing" to "certifying." This was important because during the briefing process, you can only be sure of the competence of the person giving the brief; because they're engaged in the act of giving directions, they have reason to be more alert. Whether that's because it's boring to listen to, or because they've heard this stuff before, the people being briefed may often "zone out" in the middle of the meeting and stop paying attention entirely. As you might imagine, this wouldn't make the crew feel particularly inspired or excited about what they were being asked to do.

But updating that process through the practice of "certifying" changed everything. Because instead of just being given information, certifying required crewmembers to answer highly specific questions about the task they'd just been assigned. If they were able to answer correctly, they were "certified" to be ready for the job and sent on their way. This practice therefore helped to keep the crew's attention and helped Marquet to identify unprepared or inattentive teams who were unable to answer the questions satisfactorily. The ability to determine when certain teams weren't ready for the task also increased their effectiveness because it allowed Marquet to know which teams needed a little more training or attention and which ones were best suited for a job.

## State Your Goals Clearly

As you've seen in the previous example about certification, changing the language you use in your organization can bring about fantastic results for team effectiveness and motivation. But there's one final step to help you maintain a strong and productive course. And that step is the clear identification of your goals. Because it's great that a leader-leader system opens decision-making up to everyone and allows all crewmembers to work toward a common goal. But that power is only as effective as your communication of your goals. After all, if people aren't clear about the common goal they're working towards, it makes sense that they'd struggle to achieve it.

Here's how you can ensure that you and your employees are all clear about your common goal. The best way to start is by defining your core values. No matter what they are in your business, it's important that this is clear to everyone right from the start, especially if your organization is grounded in a rich legacy or history that can be used to inspire your employees. In the case of the USS Santa Fe, of course, the crew could draw on the powerful legacy of the United States Navy and emphasize the historical importance of their work as a tool for boosting morale. For example, when they passed a sunken US submarine, pointing this out could remind the crew that their mission was to serve and protect their country and inspire them to pursue that goal with pride. But you don't have to have the Navy's legacy to effectively inspire your crew; corporations can have equally inspiring values which motivate their employees. For example, Apple's mission statement is "thinking differently," and this is regularly highlighted at employee conferences. By charting Apple's own rich legacy of technological innovation, employees can center themselves in the corporate and personal goal of cultivating original ideas.

You can also use your company mission as an incentivizer by rewarding employees whenever they make choices that embody your organization's core values. However, it's important that you praise your employees

regularly and quickly, because this is something that often gets lost in day-to-day company life. Because there are always bigger issues at hand, rewards often take days or even weeks to be processed, which means that they lose their impact. Marquet understood this and learned firsthand that praise was most effective when it was dispensed immediately. So, if one of his crewmembers made an important decision that saved the submarine from disaster, Marquet made a point of recognizing their success to the crew as soon as possible so that he could motivate his crew and reinforce the core values of their sub.

Marquet also learned that the way rewards are structured can have a significant impact on productivity. For example, rewards which encourage competition and invite co-workers to challenge or undermine each other are counterproductive because they reduce morale and invite a hostile atmosphere into your team. But man-versus-nature rewards, which encourage your crew to pit themselves against a common enemy and work together to preserve your core values, are excellent. One great example might be rewarding your employees when their hard work causes your stock prices to beat another company's.

## Final Summary

As you can see from the story of the USS Santa Fe, changing the way we think about leadership itself by employing the leader-leader mentality can literally change lives. And if we think back to the statistics we discussed in the first chapter, just imagine what a different world it would be-- and how high employee satisfaction would soar!-- if every company employed a leader-leader mentality. The good news is that this is not difficult to do. By making a few simple changes like rewarding your employees immediately, developing a plan of immediate action, eliminating briefings, and clearly identifying your core values, you can unlock your own leadership potential and encourage each of your employees to lead in their own way.





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