

“Flight of the Buffalo”

James A. Belasco and Ralph C. Stayer
Notes by Dave Kraft

This book reports my insights and struggles as I (James) sought to convert from a traditional leader to letting my employees lead. (7)

- Leaders transfer ownership for work to those who execute the work.
- Leaders create the environment for ownership where each person wants to be responsible.
- Leaders coach the development of personal capabilities.
- Leaders learn fast themselves and encourage others also to learn quickly. (19)
- Create the environment for ownership where each person wants to be responsible.
- Coach the development of personal capabilities.
- Learn faster and encourage others to do the same. (21)

I needed to learn to take pride in the collective results the company produced, not only in my singular accomplishments. (28) *The best way to empower people is to ask: What am I doing or not doing, as a leader, that prevents them from assuming responsibility and performing at the new level?* (30) *Key lesson: Don't stop with vision. Vision alone is no solution. Everything is execution.* (31) **People Rise to the Challenge—When It Is *Their* Challenge (33)** People feel powerless when they experience no control over their work. (36) Note also how focusing on things we can't control occupies our mind so that we are unable to focus creatively on what we can do to make real progress. (37) ...the leader's job is to get the people to be responsible for *their own* performance. (43) We have been making it too easy for people to be uncommitted by allowing them to blame others. (45) Too many people in organizations are subjected to authoritarian, and what they believe to be unreasonable, treatment. This is why there is so little effort to achieve in authoritarian organizations. (49)

We are treating the symptoms of high costs, inefficiencies, poor quality, lousy service, but not the root causes—inappropriate leadership paradigms. (51) The purpose of the process is not only to produce a plan. It is to produce a plan that will be owned and understood by the people who have to execute it. (56) Helping people regain their own authority and power to respond appropriately in work and life is a leadership skill of the highest order. (59) I learned how to give assignments and follow up. That relieved my work load a little. But I was still stuck with making all the decisions. People soon learned that I preferred “my way.” So they spent most of their time working to figure out “my way.” (66) As the leader of my organization I am responsible for creating the environment that enables each person to assume responsibility for his or her own performance. (67) **Leadership Solution: If you want them to act like it's their business, make it their business. (71)**

I felt that great coaches helped other people find their own answers. So I concentrated on asking questions. Great coaches had to provide guidance so people could find the “right” answer. So I sought to provide more guidance. (74) Don't get people too secure, however. Coaches help people see beyond where they are now. Coaches help people see what they can be. (75) As a coach you help people raise their expectations high enough to encourage great performance today and even greater great performance tomorrow.

1. *In the best of all worlds, what is great performance for your customers?*
 2. *What do you want to achieve in the next two to three years?*
 3. *How will you measure your performance?*
 4. *What things do you need to learn in order to reach your goals?*
 5. *What work experiences do you need to help you learn what you need to achieve your goals?*
- (78)

I've got to keep learning new leadership skills, new leadership techniques, new leadership approaches, new leadership paradigms. "You are the problem," the consultant told me. "You prevent people from really doing their jobs. You dominate meetings. You give your own solutions—sometimes even before the problem is raised. You finish other people's sentences. You state your opinions first. Who's going to argue with you? You cut people off. You change agendas during the meeting, raising issues no one else is prepared to discuss. People leave meetings feeling discouraged rather than energized. You insist on making every decision. No wonder people don't take responsibility. You won't let them." (82) First, I changed my mental picture of my leadership job. I stopped being the decision maker and micro-manager. I stopped deciding production schedules and fixing sales problems. Instead, I insisted that others handle those situations. I changed my leadership job to providing resources and developing people. (83) The Leading the Journey model is based on four leadership activities: 1. Determining focus and direction; 2. Removing the obstacles; 3. Developing ownership; 4. Stimulating self-directed action (87) The employee must own the responsibility for his or her performance, not the manager. (88)

Leadership Solution: Leadership is making it possible for others to follow by thinking strategically and focusing on the right directions, removing the obstacles, developing ownership, and taking self-directed actions. (89) Vision is the most sought-after executive characteristic. Whenever executives get together, vision is the topic of conversation. Most of them see that vision is the difference between the long-term success of any organization and a certain second-rate position. (90) The essence of executive vision is saying, "Here's where we have to go, and here's a general road map for how we will get there." We must manage backward from the future, rather than forward from the present. (91) The inspiration of a vision must exist at all levels of the organization. (93) Focusing people on the few most important factors helps them separate the "must do" items from the mountains of minutiae... (100) ...most businesses suffer not from an absence of resources, but from an absence of focus. (102)

- What are the biggest problems you face?
- What prevents you from being a great performer? (120)

Leaders who engage in thinking strategically begin with where they want to go. Then they look backward from the future and ask, "What will it take to create that new tomorrow?" It's the looking back from tomorrow that gives thinking strategically its power, (138) I have found that too many people "settle" instead of reach. (142) I learned that incorrect attitudes are a symptom of incorrect systems, structures, and practices. (202) You as the leader establish the parameters, the overall objective, the vision. You need to articulate great performance standards for the overall organization. You need to be certain that everyone's nose is pointed in the same direction. (203) Pay for results, not efforts. I learned the hard way that throwing water uphill for sixteen hours a day will only result in standing knee-deep in mud. Get clear on what great performance you want to accomplish. Then be certain that the performer has measures so that he/she knows when he/she does it. (206) If you want it, measure it. If you can't measure it, forget it. Peter Drucker wrote and spoke those strong words many years ago.

Now I know that people can and will produce great things if they know what those things are and can track their results. (216) We worked to create measurements tied to the company's goals. (217) **Question: Do all the people in your company know how well they've done before they go home every night?** (222) Motivation, communication, lack of commitment, and teamwork problems plague most organizations. These mind-set problems are usually created by systems problems. (239) My experience has taught me that the key to organizational success today is in *getting the people to want to own the responsibility for their own performance*. (249) The responsibility for performance is always owned by the performer. In addition, in each situation, the leader owns the responsibility for empowering the individual's acceptance of his/her own responsibility. Keep the responsibility for performance with the performer, and the responsibility for empowering with the leader. (252)

"Don't compromise your standards, and don't rush in to solve their problems. Keep the responsibility for performance with them." (254) Leaders don't just lob the ball into the person's court and walk away. That's not leadership. That's abdication. (256) Leaders continue to coach and support because they are genuinely interested in that individual's success. (257) Don't get sidetracked into talking about side issues. The main issue in any organization is *performance—great performance*. Keep the conversations tightly focused on what it takes to produce great performance, and what you and the performer can do, separately and together, to assure that great performance. (259) The leader encourages people to take self-directed actions to achieve great performance and remove the obstacles that stand in their path. (268) 2. Involve the performers in defining direction, identifying obstacles, developing ownership, and taking self-directed actions. (272) Help everyone in your organization identify what's crucial and not crucial, and be dispassionate in dumping the noncontributors.

Eliminate the "fat." (276) My leadership task is not to improve quality. It is to empower people to see that improving quality is essential to their great performance. (278) Second, every week everyone writes a "5/15" report, no longer than one page, which takes fifteen minutes to write and five minutes to read. That report answers three questions: "What did I accomplish this week?" "What remains to be done next week?" "What needs to be fixed/changed/eliminated?" Anything that needs fixing/changing/eliminating must be handled before the end of the next week. People constantly raise issues about procedures and systems that get in their way and prevent them from being great performers. The weekly airing of obstacles and the commitment to fix problems quickly, keeps the focus on simplifying activities to maximize results. (279) That's when I learned that others would do much more if I expected more and accepted less. (282) My leadership task is to establish direction, remove obstacles, develop ownership, and stimulate self-directed actions. (290) Knowledge is nothing without action. Nothing changes until you *do* something. What you *do* will directly determine what you learn. (313) Several years ago a CEO I know wrote eleven principles to guide his multibillion-dollar company. Rule number seven was "I expect everyone to make ten mistakes a day, but I expect originality in those mistakes." His message was clear. Making mistakes was no crime. Not learning from them was. (320)