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LEADERSHIP AND THE ART OF STRUGGLE:

How Great Leaders Grow through Challenge and Adversity

By Steven Snyder

“...a practical, thoughtful guide to creating sanity,
as well as ‘purpose and meaning’ within leadership.”

– *Publishers Weekly*

Today’s leaders face a barrage of challenges, brought on by a weak economy and a fast moving, rapidly changing business environment. Still, leaders at all levels are reluctant to openly acknowledge their struggles for fear of appearing weak, indecisive, or even incompetent. But one top leadership expert with a background in psychology suggests that great leadership is in fact *signified* by struggle.

In **LEADERSHIP AND THE ART OF STRUGGLE: How Great Leaders Grow through Challenge and Adversity** (Berrett-Koehler; paperback; March 11, 2013), former Microsoft executive Steven Snyder argues that struggle is an innate part of leadership that should be embraced as an opportunity for breakthrough success rather than feared as a career-killer. The key to this mindset shift, according to Snyder, is in viewing struggle as an *art to be mastered*.

“Struggle and leadership are unquestionably intertwined,” writes Snyder. “When struggle is viewed as an art to be mastered, a new set of strategies and practices emerges, enabling leaders to elevate their skills to ever-greater heights.”

Drawing on his experience working closely with Bill Gates in the early days of Microsoft, his Ph.D. in psychology, and scores of real struggles faced by leaders at companies such as Apple, Target, Best Buy, Wells Fargo, and General Mills, Snyder offers readers a crash-course in struggle mastery, ushering in a three-part framework for how to not only cope with struggle but thrive because of it:

Become Grounded

Developing a solid understanding of the root of struggle – change, tensions, and/or being out of balance – is the first step to mastering the art of struggle. From there, Snyder explores the various ways leaders cope with struggle, and offers grounding practices for growing through struggle, among them: develop adaptive energy, which includes adopting a growth mindset; discover and map your tension points; and restore balance through centering and finding the support you need.

Explore New Pathways

After becoming grounded, the second strategy to mastering the art of struggle is breaking out of old habits and thought patterns to explore new pathways and solutions. This entails navigating tensions and reimagining the situation to discover new paths; illuminating and overcoming blind spots in personality, values, strategy, and conflict; transcending conflict to envision common ground; and unearthing purpose and meaning through struggle.

Deepen Adaptive Energy

The leadership journey is a marathon requiring energy for the long-haul. Snyder outlines how leaders can fully realize their potential by preparing for what lies ahead with practices including: envisioning the future; harnessing the engine of discipline; and celebrating what is precious.

“Fulfilling your potential as a leader requires that you think differently about leadership,” Snyder writes. “You must recast your struggles as positive learning experiences and view them as necessary steps in your development as a leader.”

Packed with actionable advice, **LEADERSHIP AND THE ART OF STRUGGLE** brings a fresh perspective to the leadership dialogue, exposing an oft-considered taboo topic and providing leaders a playbook for confronting, embracing, and ultimately mastering struggle.

**LEADERSHIP AND THE ART OF STRUGGLE:
How Great Leaders Grow through Challenge and Adversity**

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**About Steven Snyder,
author of LEADERSHIP AND THE ART OF STRUGGLE**



Steven Snyder is the founder and managing director of Snyder Leadership Group.

Snyder joined **Microsoft** in 1983, when the company was in its infancy. His work there, praised by Bill Gates, secured the relationship with IBM during a crucial stage in Microsoft's growth and helped shape the history of the personal computer industry. Promoted as Microsoft's first business unit general manager, Snyder led the company's Development Tool business, where his team won *PC Magazine's* Technical Excellence Award on three occasions.

In 1996, Snyder co-founded **Net Perceptions**, where he commercialized "collaborative filtering" – a technology that enables the real-time personalized recommendations that have become central to the online shopping experience. This groundbreaking work won Snyder the first-ever World Technology Award for Commerce in 1999 for "contributing to the advance of emerging technologies for the benefit of business and society."

Snyder holds an MBA from the Harvard Business School, where he was a Baker Scholar, and a Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Minnesota. *Leadership and the Art of Struggle* is his first book.

**An interview with Steven Snyder,
author of LEADERSHIP AND THE ART OF STRUGGLE**

Q: Counter to commonly held beliefs about leadership struggle, you write that great leadership is *signified* by struggle. Can you explain what you mean by this?

A: Struggle is often viewed as a problem – something to be overcome quickly and without too many people knowing. Yet, struggle is a central component to great leadership as it provides a growth opportunity of unparalleled proportions.

Consider Steve Jobs. In 1983, Jobs introduced the Lisa, Apple's first computer with a graphical interface. In a presentation to journalists, Jobs was charismatic, passionate, and nothing short of mesmerizing. Yet behind the bravado was a highly conflicted man, who was struggling on many different levels. The struggle continued as Jobs' aggressive, disrespectful management style alienated him from colleagues and ultimately led to him leaving the company he helped found.

Two decades later, a very different Jobs emerged to deliver the 2005 Stanford University commencement address. He had confronted his struggles, navigated challenges, and went on to become one of the most influential leaders of our time. Without struggle and the growth opportunity it provided, it is doubtful Jobs would have ever risen to such greatness.

Q: In the book, you talk about adaptive energy. What is adaptive energy and why is it so important for leaders?

A: When leaders are in the midst of struggle, their ability to recognize what is unfolding around them and adapt their energy to make informed, well-reasoned choices is critical.

Adaptive energy aligns leaders' actions both with the external circumstances necessary for success and with their inner values and principles. It allows leaders to listen to feedback and incorporate new learning while remaining true to themselves.

Q: You outline a set of core practices for increasing adaptive energy and growing through struggle. How did you arrive at these practices as the key to, as you write, *mastering the art struggle*?

A: In my research, I carefully studied struggle stories of 93 leaders, encompassing 151 distinct struggle episodes. I listened to how these leaders navigated through their challenges. The practices in the book are a synthesis of the collective wisdom of this group.

Q: One grounding practice you suggest is centering your mind, body, and spirit. Why is this important for leaders in the midst of struggle?

A: Leaders need some way to anchor and balance themselves in times of turbulence. Whether through mindfulness, meditation, listening to music, walks, painting, or any other variety of activities, centering activities help leaders remain grounded despite the chaos around them.

Q: In your dozens of interviews—including many current and former CEOs as well as high level non-profit, government and military leaders—what did you find most surprising as it pertains to struggle?

A: Without exception, every leader had his or her own personal story of struggle. This tells me that struggle is a universal hallmark of leadership, something that every leader goes through.

What surprised me was how many “aha” moments leaders had and the insights they gleaned *during* our conversations. Without a forum to openly discuss their struggles, leaders had kept their struggles quietly bottled up. With the opportunity to discuss their challenges, light bulbs began to go off, and these leaders came to new insights about their growth. This interview process highlighted for me the importance of open dialog surrounding struggle as a way to help leaders synthesize their learning more comprehensively.

Q: Your career path has taken many interesting turns. How has this shaped your understanding of struggle?

A: I was very fortunate to work at Microsoft in the 1980s. We were a small company with big dreams, and the struggles were numerous. From my close-up perch, I observed how Bill Gates navigated through the challenges, and I include several of these stories in the book.

Another opportunity to understand struggle first-hand came when I started Net Perceptions, an Internet company, in 1996. Starting a company from scratch is very different than going into a company that is already operating. Everything needs to be built from the ground up, and the pace of growth was far faster than even the frenetic pace at Microsoft.

Q: If readers took away one thing from this book, what do you hope that would be?

A: One of my goals in writing this book is that the taboo surrounding leadership struggle would be dispelled and replaced with a healthier, more accurate view of struggle. My hope is that leaders walk away with an understanding that struggle is par for the leader course, but also, that they can *master* struggle – using it as an opportunity for their greatest growth.

Praise for LEADERSHIP AND THE ART OF STRUGGLE

"Leadership and the Art of Struggle provides you with the opportunity to learn from Snyder's remarkable wisdom and the experience of his interviewees. It is a living guide that you can return to time and time again as new situations arise."

—Foreword from **Bill George**, former CEO Medtronic, bestselling author of *True North*

"Steven Snyder's Leadership and the Art of Struggle is the must-read leadership book of the year. It is one of the most intelligent, revealing, and practical books on the subject I have ever read. It confronts a vital truth about leadership: the truth that challenge is the crucible for greatness and that these adversities introduce us to ourselves."

—**Jim Kouzes**, coauthor of the bestselling book *The Leadership Challenge*

"A very fresh and inspiring perspective that constructively embraces the natural tensions that all leaders encounter every day. I heartily recommend it to any leader who aspires to lead and contribute more fully."

—**Douglas R. Conant**, former CEO of Campbell Soup Company, bestselling author of *TouchPoints*

"Snyder boldly tackles a subject that every leader needs to master. Sometimes leadership is a struggle, and these are the times that really put us to the test. This insightful book will teach you how to thrive during life's most challenging moments."

—**Marshall Goldsmith**, bestselling author of *MOJO* and *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*

"If you are leading an organization of any kind today or desire to lead one in the future, you need to read Leadership and the Art of Struggle."

—**Frank Russomanno**, former CEO, Imation

"Leadership and the Art of Struggle contains compelling stories of great leaders who have struggled with various facets of their leadership responsibility. It offers practical advice and tools to help you deal more effectively with the inevitable struggles of leadership."

—**Trudy Rautio**, President and CEO, Carlson

"The leadership journey is rewarding but definitely not easy. Every leader struggles at some point. Leadership and the Art of the Struggle gives you clear and compelling advice on transforming pitfalls into possibilities."

—**Jodee Kozlak**, Executive Vice President, Human Resources, Target

"This book resonates to the core. It gives us grounding and offers precise practices for locating our work deep in the soul. Steven makes the dive into the waters of purposeful living and leading deep and attractive. What a delightful dive!"

—**Richard Leider**, bestselling author of *The Power of Purpose* and *Repacking Your Bags*

"The French writer Albert Camus tells us 'In the depth of winter, I finally learned that there was within me an invincible summer.' Snyder wisely observes that we can best strike a blow against

tragedy and disappointment by using it as inspiration to make a positive difference in the lives of others through our personal leadership.”

—**Marilyn Carlson Nelson**, Chairman, Carlson

“This is the right book for these times. Leadership has become more difficult in the chaotic world we live; Steven acknowledges that and draws on his own deep experience and the lessons learned of others to help any new, aspiring, or well-worn leader!”

—**Beverly Kaye**, founder, Career Systems International, coauthor of *Help Them Grow or Watch Them Go*

“Steven guides you on a journey that can be deeply fulfilling as well as enlightening. I recommend for any leader who wants to engage more authentically and constructively in a complex and ever-changing world.”

—**Mary Brainerd**, CEO, HealthPartners

“*Leadership and the Art of Struggle* deserves to be a leadership classic! Snyder brilliantly charts a course to strengthen ourselves through the important crucibles of challenge and adversity. If you want to build more authentic leadership in yourself and others, get this life-changing book!”

—**Kevin Cashman**, Senior Partner, Korn/Ferry International, bestselling author, *The Pause Principle*

“Snyder has opened an intriguing and insightful portal into the challenge of leadership. You’ll be inspired and invigorated with ideas that you can immediately put into action.”

—**Kevin Wilde**, Chief Learning Officer, General Mills, author of *Dancing with the Talent Stars*

“Life in a start-up is chaotic, intense and unpredictable. Snyder knows this world well and gives you sage advice on how to remain grounded, focused, and energized. This is a book that every entrepreneur or would-be entrepreneur should read.”

—**Michael Gorman**, Managing Director, Split Rock Partners

“Steven Snyder covers all the bases from channeling your energy to managing conflict, including a great segment about overcoming your leadership blind spots. *Leadership and the Art of Struggle* is full of real-life examples of leaders who emerged from tough times better and stronger than before. This encouraging book is a must-read!”

—**Ken Blanchard**, coauthor of *The One Minute Manager*® and *Great Leaders Grow*