

# The Mind of a Leader

The psychology of leadership is changing. Today's organizations want leaders who coach rather than control, who give counsel, not commands.

To teach these skills to students, educators are delving into the minds of effective leaders to discover just what makes them tick.

by **Tricia Bisoux**

illustration by Stuart Bradford

## **Traditional concepts of leadership are deeply ingrained in the human psyche:**

Children grow up playing “follow the leader,” mimicking every action and gesture of the child at the front of the line. In movies, the platoon leader never leaves behind a soldier, and the captain always goes down with his ship. In essence, leaders direct, command, and control, receiving the glory and accepting the blame.

At least, that's the way it *used* to be. Enter the leader for a new age, one equipped to work in groups, make decisions collaboratively, and delegate power to others. As corporations require more leaders and fewer followers to add to their ranks, many business schools are reinventing their programs to educate a new generation of leaders who must, in essence, defy tradition.

“In the past, business believed that a leader was like the captain of a ship: cool, calm, collected,” says Barry Posner, dean of Santa Clara University's Leavey School of Business in California, and professor in its Institute of Spirituality and Leadership. “Now, we see that leaders need to be human. They need to be in touch, they need to be empathetic, and they need to be with people. Leaders need to be a part of what's going on, not apart from what's going on.”

Indeed, the diehard mavericks of yesteryear would find

themselves quickly overwhelmed in the modern business environment. As a result, corporations have made it clear that the traditional mainstays of leadership—individualism, unilateral decision-making, and edicts from the mountaintop—simply won't cut it anymore. Instead, it's the cheerleaders rather than the ringleaders whom corporations seek. It's up to business schools to fill that order.

### **The Discipline to Lead**

Many believe it's time to make leadership a discipline in itself, because its purview has expanded considerably. Leadership skills are a necessity for the kindergarten teacher, the Peace Corps volunteer, the family member. It's not just for CEOs and high-ranking government officials anymore.

Already students from institutions that offer degree programs in leadership are in demand. For example, programs such as the decade-old Jepson School for Leadership Studies, an undergraduate liberal arts program at the University of Richmond in Virginia, and the one-year-old MBA/Master of Arts in Leadership at the Thierry Graduate School of Leadership in Brussels, Belgium, have come into their own.

Leadership degree programs are the “actual expression of



## The Center for Creative Leadership Greensboro, North Carolina

“The most distinctive difference between what the Center teaches and what business schools teach is insight-based training versus skill-based training.”—John Alexander

Established in 1970, the Center for Creative Leadership offers customized training programs and open enrollment for approximately 1,000 companies, including General Motors Corp., Pfizer Inc., and the United States Postal Service. Each year, the Center serves more than 25,000 professionals, from business, education, government, and the nonprofit sector.

In addition to its Greensboro campus, CCL also has campuses in San Diego, California; Colorado Springs, Colorado; and Brussels, Belgium. Ranked as a top-ten nondegree executive education provider by the *Financial Times*, CCL has also been ranked as No. 1 in leadership development in *BusinessWeek*'s executive education survey. It was the only non-business school to rank in the top 20.

At the heart of CCL's programs is its trademark “360-degree feedback” tool, in which participants complete

surveys about their own leadership abilities. Their supervisors and peers then fill out the same survey. Such evaluation, both self-evaluation and peer review, is crucial to leadership development, says CCL's president, John Alexander.

“We're beginning to understand leadership as a process that occurs between and among people in groups,” says Alexander. “You're not going to do well as a leader if you try to do it in isolation.”



the strong ‘renaissance’ of leadership in recent years,” emphasizes Jean-Pierre Bal, director of the MBA/MAL program at the Thierry School. “The real challenge to our field of education is that leadership is not an exact science, nor are its boundaries precisely defined. By its very nature, leadership generates a continuous state of alertness, awareness, and adaptation of its contents.”

In fact, “leadership” is no longer about directing or managing—it’s about taking initiative, says Joanne Ciulla, a professor of leadership at the Jepson School. “When our students are 22 years old, they’re not going to run General Motors, but they might be leaders in their work groups, or in their homes and communities,” she says. “We are sending the message to students that leadership is not about being the boss or at the top of the heap. It’s about taking responsibility.”

Transforming leadership from a single course here and there into a *discipline* is a necessity, many educators argue. Only through such focused study can institutions fill the growing need for leaders, not only in business, but in society, says John Alexander, president of the Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro, North Carolina.

“There has been a huge shift in thinking. Our tendency has been always to look to an individual for leadership,” says Alexander. “But now there’s an understanding that leadership is not always correlated with positions of power and authority. It is something that can come from anywhere in an organization or community. It can manifest in many places in many different ways.”

### Leadership’s Gone “Soft”

A study from The Leadership Trust Foundation of Herefordshire, England, found that 73 percent of CEOs removed from their posts were fired as a result of “ineffective leadership”—more than the number of executives fired for unethical behavior. Add to that the implosive effects of unethical accounting practices with companies such as Enron, WorldCom, Global Crossing, and other prominent American corporations. Many experts believe it’s not difficult to assign a cause to these disturbing effects: A lack of adequate leadership skills is becoming epidemic.

Such examples are a call to action, says Roger Gill, program director of the MBA/Master of Arts in Leadership program at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, Scotland. Gill is also director of the Research Centre for Leadership Studies at The Leadership Trust Foundation, which runs the program jointly with the University of Strathclyde.

“Practical leadership skills have been severely neglected in business school programs—on both sides of the Atlantic,”

says Gill. “Most MBA programs have concentrated on cognitive learning, management models, and the use of management tools and techniques. In spite of this, they’re still turning out what *BusinessWeek* 20 years ago called ‘highly skilled barbarians.’” Practical leadership skills such as emotional intelligence, teamwork and teambuilding skills, facilitation skills, oral communication skills, coaching and mentoring, and scenario planning, he argues, have largely been left out of the business school curriculum.

Many believe that this state of affairs is in the process of changing—quickly. Private and public organizations have expressed a need for a new type of leader, emphasizes Bal of the Thierry School. The functional “hard skills” of business,



Roger Gill

**University of Strathclyde**  
**MBA in Leadership Studies**  
**Glasgow, Scotland**

“Leadership, among other things, is about empowering people to manage themselves. And it is about using one’s personal power to win the hearts and minds of people to achieve a common purpose.”—Roger Gill

University of Strathclyde’s 36-month MBA in Leadership Studies began in October 2000, as a joint project between the University of Strathclyde and The Leadership Trust Foundation of Herefordshire, England. The program requires at least three years of work experience and comprises 180 credit hours, including 25 days of residential learning in combination with a variety of distance learning methods.

The goals for students in the MBA/LS program are four-fold, explains its director Roger Gill. First, they must learn about leadership; second, they develop increased self-awareness, self-control, and self-confidence as leaders and followers; third, students develop strong coaching and mentoring skills in one-to-one leader-follower situations; finally, they must learn to apply their newfound knowledge and skills in a leadership project.

Such objectives feed into a new reality for today’s leaders, Gill explains, one based on group dynamics rather than hierarchical organization. “Recently, there has been a de-emphasizing of ‘heroic’ leaders—who tend to be short-lived anyway—and an increasing emphasis on ‘collaborative’ leaders,” he says. Even more important, he adds, leaders must have the ability “to empower people to be able to do what needs to be done and inspire and motivate them to want to do it.”

such as marketing, finance, and operations, are “no longer a guarantee for success,” says Bal. “The so-called ‘soft skills’ are now equally important, if not more. Teaching those skills is within the realm of leadership education.”

Higher education institutions, not only business schools, have turned to these soft skills with a vengeance. But those skills are a bit more amorphous than the standard university fare. It’s easy to teach the “hard skills” of statistical analysis, accounting, and even organizational behavior, say educators. They each follow a process and produce a product. Less tangible are notions of self-awareness and evaluation, group interaction, communication, and the leviathan of soft skills, moral fortitude.

**Jepson School of Leadership Studies**  
**University of Richmond**  
**Richmond, Virginia**

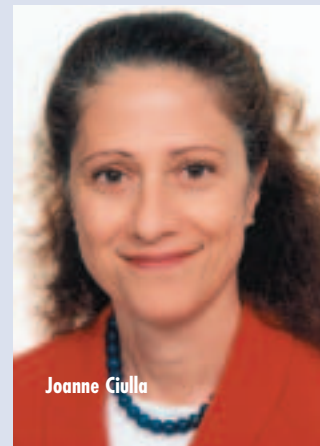
“Leadership today is about values, working with people, building consensus. It’s about thinking about a greater good than yourself. It’s not about the guy on the white horse anymore.”—Joanne Ciulla

Established at the University of Richmond in 1992, the Jepson School of Leadership is one of the first undergraduate schools to focus on leadership as a course of study. The Jepson School presents students with an interdisciplinary approach to the liberal arts taught through the lens of leadership issues.

Many people assume that the Jepson School is a business school, but that is a misperception, says Joanne Ciulla, a founding faculty member and the Coston Family Chair in Leadership and Ethics at the Jepson School. “We are a school of leadership,” she stresses. “We are autonomous, like a law school or business school within a university, so we are able to grant degrees in leadership. Our students often go on to business school, but they also go to law school, nonprofit organizations, or the Peace Corps.”

The school has nine faculty members, some of whom are anthropologists, historians, and philosophers. The school serves approximately 80 to 100 students pursuing majors in leadership in a given year, as well as 50 to 70 students pursuing minors. Interested students apply to the school in their sophomore year, and are considered for admission based on their academic performance and recommendations, an essay, and extracurricular activities. Fewer than half of those who apply are accepted to the Jepson School.

“The mission of our school is to educate our students to take on the moral responsibility of leadership, to see leadership as a service to society,” Ciulla says. “A message our students receive very early on is that it’s not about being the boss. It’s about taking responsibility and having a desire to want to make things better.”



Joanne Ciulla

“We are teaching something that is an abstraction. It’s not like teaching math or history. What we’re doing lies between theory and practice,” says Ciulla. “However, when our students leave, we want to make sure they’re able to pull together the theory of leadership with the practice of leadership, and incorporate the values involved in both.”

### Leader, Know Thyself

There has been growing awareness of the psychological dimension of leadership, according to Alexander of the Center for Creative Leadership. That dimension is, perhaps, the greatest challenge for educators—determining how they can unlock students’ knowledge of their own motivations and principles so that they are better able to influence others, he says.

“At CCL, we tend to view leadership through the lens of the behavioral sciences, such as psychology. We look at leadership in the general framework of ‘emotional intelligence’—the so-called ‘human’ side of leadership,” says Alexander. “If you don’t understand yourself very well, your chance of being able to influence, inspire, and empower others is low.”

Bal of the Thierry School agrees, noting that self-assessment—whether an individual is a low-level manager, an upper-level executive, or the leader of volunteer group—is the foundation of good leadership today. “The most difficult process for faculty is to stimulate each participant to learn how his or her own personality and conduct influence others,” he says. “This is where the vast domain of self-leadership actually starts: self-awareness, self-improvement, and the ability to cope with disappointments and failure.”

This point has emerged clearly at Santa Clara University’s Leavey School of Business. As part of the course of study at its Institute for Spirituality and Leadership, executives come to campus each month to give an “up-close-and-personal” presentation about their thoughts on what it takes to be a good leader. The results, says its dean Barry Posner, can be eye-opening, for the visiting executives as much as for the students.

“The speakers tell me that it’s the most difficult presentation they’ve ever prepared,” says Posner. “I’m not asking them to speak about their businesses. I’m asking them to talk about how they learned to lead and what it means to them to be leaders. One of our speakers said she had to go back and call people with whom she’d worked in the past and ask them what they thought she did.”

While leadership is no longer a “heroic” ideal, the idea of *courage* has not disappeared. Courage—the ability to stand up for what one believes and work for what one knows is



## Santa Clara University

Leavey School of Business

Institute for Spirituality and Organizational Leadership  
Santa Clara, California

“Leadership is a learnable, observable set of behaviors. The key is within everybody’s grasp.”—Barry Posner

Researchers who study leadership say that the field has taken on an emotional, if not psychological dimension. The Institute for Spirituality and Organizational Leadership, following SCU’s tradition in Jesuit teachings, has added to this a spiritual dimension. Professor Andre Delbecq founded the Institute four years ago after a sabbatical during which he studied a variety of religious traditions, from Christianity to Buddhism to Taoism.

“The school was created in response to requests from the business community,” says Delbecq. “It has become clear that it is impossible to be an effective leader unless you have a deep, inner compass to guide you.”

The Institute offers an elective course that explores subjects of meditation, prayer, and inner exploration; the program also looks at leadership as a noble calling and organizations as a source of potential. Students study the types of behaviors that often undermine effective leadership, such as hubris and greed. More than 200 students have chosen to take the course. In addition, the Institute is forming a leadership forum for those graduates of the course who would like to continue the dialogue on the intersection of spirituality and leadership.

Barry Posner, dean of the Leavey School and a professor of leadership, has studied the topic for 25 years. The Institute, he says, represents an evolution of how business views leadership. “In the past, we’ve looked at leadership as it relates to corporate culture and shared values,” he says. “Now, that has taken us to the notion that leadership development should involve exploration of a person’s ‘inner territory.’”

Perhaps never before has **leadership** been so consciously discussed, debated, defined, and in many cases, debunked.

## The Thierry Graduate School of Leadership

MBA/Master of Arts in Leadership  
Brussels, Belgium

“Management is about today—showing people how to do. Leadership is about tomorrow—showing people where to go.” —Jean-Pierre Bal

A relatively young program, the MBA/MAL program has been in place at the Thierry School since last year. Rather than a specialized MBA, it is considered a dual-degree program, explains program director Jean-Pierre Bal.

“The teaching and learning of MBA course subjects lie within the professional scope of graduate business schools,” notes Bal. “But in order to expand the scope of leadership as a field of its own, it cannot be part of a business school; it requires another learning approach and structure.”

The dual degree generally takes between 18 and 36 months to complete. The program spans 21 courses: 11 MBA courses, four transition courses titled “leadership and change management,” and six in the MAL curriculum. Students earn their MBA degrees first. The 15-month MAL program, which is held subsequent to the completion of the MBA degree, comprises interactive lectures, workshops, and coaching sessions, and covers issues of ethics, teamwork, personal assessment, creative thinking, intuitive skills, and crisis management.

Thierry makes a significant distinction between the MBA degree and the MAL degree: Those studying for the former are called *students*; those studying for the latter are called *participants*. The distinction is, in large part, a result of the course content of each, explains Bal. MBA students study marketing, finance, and other hard business skills. MAL participants, however, must practice, implement, and act on their newfound skills.

In other words, the key distinction between the MBA and MAL programs, says Bal, is that between theory and practice. “In our system, there is no emphasis on formal or theoretical research work. We view leadership as learning-by-practice, not as science-by-study.”



Jean-Pierre Bal

right—is perhaps the most difficult soft skill to instill in students, says Posner.

“We go further than skills and abilities,” he says. “We try to peel the onion back one more level and talk about values. We ask each student, ‘What’s important to you? What would you be willing to stand up for?’”

In turn, the students often learn by asking visiting speakers that same question. “When we invite speakers here to talk about leadership, they’ll often talk about things they did,” says Posner, “Students will ask, ‘What made you believe you could do that?’ Speakers will say, ‘Well, I just knew.’ And students will ask, ‘How did you deal with self-doubt?’”

Those are tough questions, questions that leaders of two decades ago might never have asked themselves. But that’s the point, says Posner. “All of the people who come here to talk about leadership on a personal level end up thanking me afterward for the invitation. They gain new insights on themselves, making connections they hadn’t made before they came.”

### Management Isn’t Enough

What *does* it mean to be a leader? Perhaps never before has leadership been so consciously discussed, debated, defined, and in many cases, debunked. But one thing is clear: Its evolution is far from over. And many are looking to business schools to, yes, lead the way.

Interdisciplinary business education, including the liberal arts, may be a step in the right direction, says Ciulla. “Having been in both worlds, I would say that business schools are really behind the times in leadership studies. Many of them are teaching the social science stuff, but you can’t understand leadership from just one discipline alone. It’s bigger than that.”

For instance, Ciulla believes that dropping courses that seem too oriented toward the liberal arts, such as history, can be a mistake for business schools. “Many business schools have eliminated their business historians, but business history in a time of drastic change is one of the most important areas for a business school student to study,” says Ciulla. “Students come here, and they don’t know how we got to where we are.”

More important, an overemphasis on *management* education may be another problem. A renewed focus on *leadership* education may keep business schools at the top when it comes to supplying corporations with the people they need.

“You can’t be an effective manager these days without being an effective leader. There’s too much complexity, too much turbulence to simply ‘manage,’” says Posner. “Management is all about the status quo; leadership is about doing things differently.” 