



A Leadership Primer

General Colin Powell

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Comments after each of Colin Powell's quotes were written by Mr. *Oren Harari*, a professor at the University of San Francisco.



General Colin Powell

Chairman (Ret), Joint Chiefs of Staff

The Man

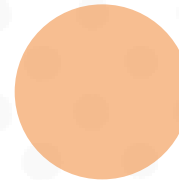
Colin Powell is the first black secretary of state in U.S. history. Powell was born in New York City to Jamaican immigrants. He became the national security adviser to President Ronald Reagan in 1987. In 1989, Powell was promoted to the rank of four-star general and was named chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff later that same year - the first black officer to hold the nation's highest military post.



Career Tips from Collin Powell

Colin Powell is a "problem solver", a man who knows how to make the system work with minimal friction, someone who carries out the vision, not the one who imagines it.

- "Do it my way or else I walk - that's not my style" Powell once said. He is not the general who says: "That's an order." "I don't think I've ever done that in 35 years of service," Powell says. "If I have to, I assure you, I can fire people. But I always find it much better to try to solve problems, not to create problems for your bosses."
- To climb the ladder of success, one must show the essential quality of stewardship, serving in a manner that encourages confidence, trust and loyalty. Great leaders like Colin Powell have shown that they are exemplary caretakers of the interests and the purposes they serve.





Lesson 1:

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- It's inevitable, if you're honorable.
- Trying to get everyone to like you is a sign of mediocrity.
- You'll avoid the tough decisions, you'll avoid confronting the people who need to be confronted, and you'll avoid offering differential rewards based on differential performance because some people might get upset.
- Ironically, by procrastinating on the difficult choices, you'll simply ensure that the only people you'll wind up angering are the most creative and productive people in the organisation.





Lesson 2:

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If this were a litmus test, the majority of CEOs would fail. CEO's often build many barriers to upward communication, thus intimidating people from approaching them.



In many corporate cultures, asking for help is seen as a weakness, so people cover up their mistakes and the organization suffers.



Real leaders make themselves accessible and available. They show concern even as they demand high standards.



Lesson 3:

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- Small companies don't have the time for experts. They don't have the money to subsidise lofty elites, either. The president answers the phone and drives the truck when necessary; everyone on the payroll visibly contributes to bottom-line results or they're history.
- But as companies get bigger, they often forget who "brought them to the dance": Things like all-hands involvement, egalitarianism, informality, market intimacy, daring, risk, speed, agility.
- Policies that emanate from ivory towers often have an adverse impact on the people out in the field who are fighting the wars or bringing in the revenues.





Lesson 4:

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- Learn from the pros, observe them, seek them out as mentors and partners.
- But remember that even the pros may become complacent and lazy. Leadership does not emerge from blind obedience to anyone.
- Xerox's Barry Rand was right on target when he warned his people that if you have a yes-man working for you, one of you is redundant.



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- Strategy is worthless without execution. All the great ideas and visions in the world amount to nothing unless they can be implemented rapidly and efficiently.
- Good leaders delegate and empower others liberally - but they pay attention to details, every day. Bad leaders, even those who fancy themselves as "visionaries," think they're somehow "above" operational details.
- Great leaders, even as they pay attention to details, continually encourage people to challenge the process. The job of a leader is not to be the chief organiser, but the chief dis-organiser.





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- It's easier to ask for forgiveness than permission. Good leaders don't wait for official blessing to try things out.
- They're not reckless but they realise if you ask enough people for permission, you'll inevitably come up against someone who believes their job is to say "no." So the moral is, don't ask unless you are required to.
- Bad leaders believe: "If I haven't explicitly been told 'yes,' I can't do it," whereas the good leaders believe, "If I haven't explicitly been told 'no,' I can." There's a world of difference between these two points of view.



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"If it ain't broke, don't fix it" is the slogan of the complacent, the arrogant or the scared. It's an excuse for inaction, a call to non-arms. It's a mind-set that assumes (or hopes) that today's realities will continue tomorrow in a tidy, linear and predictable fashion. Pure fantasy.



In this sort of culture, you won't find much innovation. Here's a little tip: Don't invest in these companies.



Lesson 8:

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- Your best assets are people. We've heard this expression so often that it's become trite. But how many leaders really "walk the talk" with this stuff? Too often, people are assumed to be empty chess pieces to be moved around by grand viziers.
- Great leaders immerse themselves in the goal of creating an environment where the best, the brightest and the most creative are attracted, retained and, most importantly, unleashed.

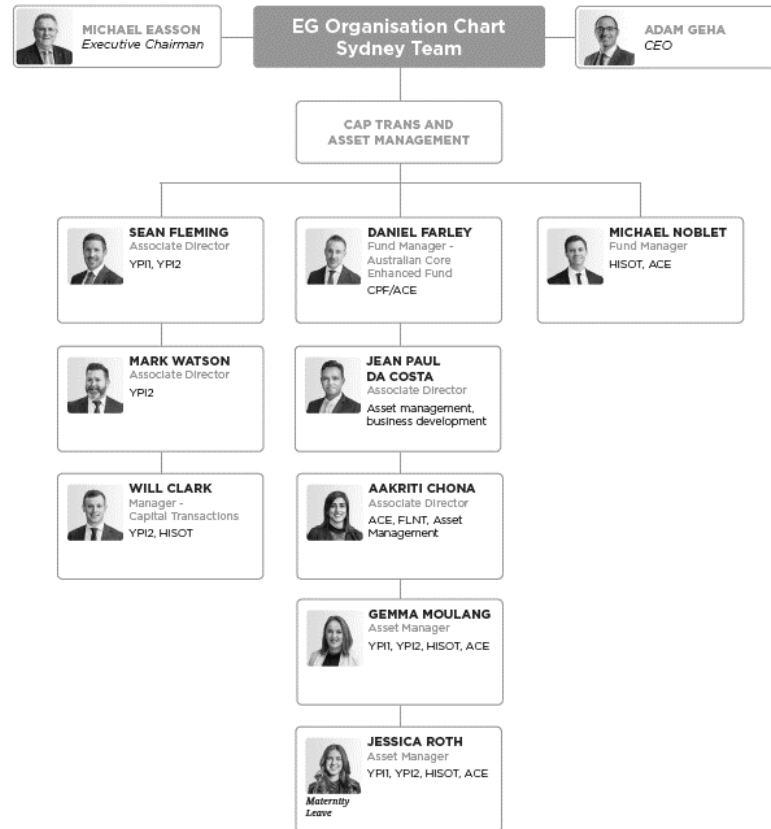


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- Organisation charts are frozen, out-of-date photos. If people really followed organisation charts, companies would collapse.
- In well-run organisations, titles are also pretty meaningless. At best, they advertise an official status conferring the ability to give orders.
- But titles mean little in terms of real power, which is the capacity to influence and inspire.
- Have you ever noticed that people will personally commit to certain individuals who on paper (or on the organisation chart) possess little authority, but instead possess integrity, drive and expertise.



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- Too often, change is stifled by people who cling to familiar turfs and job descriptions.
- Good leaders understand that every one of our jobs is becoming obsolete. The proper response is to obsolete our activities before someone else does.
- Effective leaders create a climate where people's worth is determined by their willingness to learn new skills and grab new responsibilities, thus continually reinventing their jobs.
- The most important question in performance evaluation becomes not, "How well did you perform your job since the last time we met?" but, "How much did you change it?"





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- Blindly following a particular fad generates rigidity in thought and action.
- Sometimes speed to market is more important than quality. Sometimes an unapologetic directive is more appropriate than participatory discussion. Some situations require the leader to hover closely; others require long, loose leashes.
- Leaders honour their core values but they are flexible in how they execute them. They understand that management techniques are not magic mantras but simply tools to be reached for at the right times.



Lesson 12:

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- The ripple effect of a leader's enthusiasm and optimism is awesome. So is the impact of cynicism and pessimism. Leaders who whine and blame engender those same behaviors among their colleagues.
- I am talking about a gung-ho attitude that says, "We can change things here, we can achieve awesome goals, we can be the best."
- Spare me the grim litany of the "realist," give me the unrealistic aspirations of the optimist, any day.





Lesson 13:

"Powell's Rules for Picking People:

Look for intelligence and judgment, and most critically, a capacity to anticipate, to see around corners. Also look for loyalty, integrity, a high energy drive, a balanced ego, and the drive to get things done."



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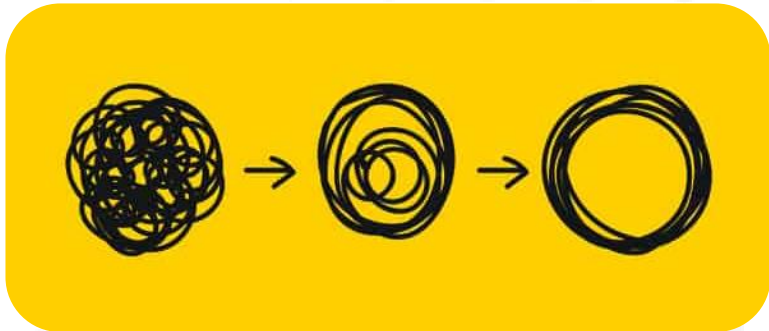
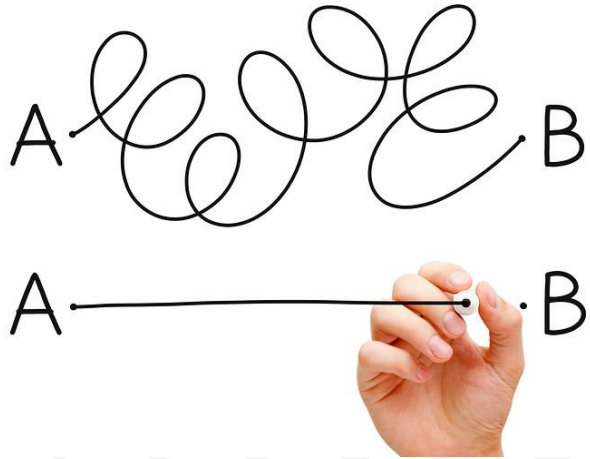
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- More often than not, we ignore the able attributes in favour of experience.
- You can train a bright, willing novice in the fundamentals of your business fairly readily, but it's a lot harder to train someone to have integrity, judgment, energy, balance and the drive to get things done.
- Good leaders stack the deck in their favour, in the recruitment phase.



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- Effective leaders understand the KISS principle: Keep It Simple, Stupid.
- A clear vision and vivid values will help your team to make sound decisions.
- Leaders make decisions that are crisp and clear, not tentative and ambiguous. Consistency in actions, aligned with the picture of the future they paint. The result: clarity of purpose, credibility of leadership, and integrity in organisation.



Lesson 15:

Part I: “Use the formula $P = 40$ to 70 , in which P stands for the probability of success and the numbers indicate the percentage of information acquired.”

Part II: “Once the information is in the 40 to 70 range, go with your gut.”

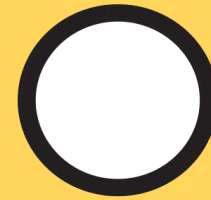


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- Don't wait until you have enough facts to be 100 % sure, because by then it is almost always too late. Excessive delays in the name of information-gathering breeds "analysis paralysis."
- Procrastination in the name of reducing risk actually increases risk.



LATER



NOW



Lesson 16:

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- Too often, the reverse defines corporate culture. This is one of the main reasons why leaders like Richard Branson of Virgin have kept their corporate staff to a bare-bones minimum.
- Shift the power and the financial accountability to the folks who are bringing in the beans, not the ones who are counting or analysing them.



Lesson 17:

"Have fun in your command. Don't always run at a breakneck pace. Take leave when you've earned it: Spend time with your families.

Corollary: surround yourself with people who take their work seriously, but not themselves, those who work hard and play hard."

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Seek people who have some balance in their lives, who are fun to hang out with, who like to laugh (at themselves, too) and who have some non-job priorities which they approach with the same passion that they do their work.



Spare me the grim workaholic or the pompous, pretentious "professional". I'll help them find jobs with my competitor.



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- Harry Truman was right: “the buck stops here”.
- You can encourage participative management and bottom-up employee involvement, but ultimately the essence of leadership is the willingness to make the tough, unambiguous choices that will have an impact on the fate of the organisation.
- I've seen too many non-leaders flinch from this responsibility. Even as you create an informal, open, collaborative corporate culture, prepare to be lonely.





**“Leadership is the art of
accomplishing more than the science
of management says is possible.”**

