

LEADERSPRITZ

THE INTERPERSONAL LEADERSHIP COCKTAIL



Marianne Schmid Mast, PhD
Tristan Palese, PhD
Benjamin Tur, PhD

Successful leaders have one thing in common: they are experts in social interaction. They express themselves clearly and effectively, understand their colleagues, and adapt to all situations. As a leader, you need to not only be able to inspire, motivate, and convince those around you, but also listen, be attentive, and adapt to your co-workers. It is by combining these skills that we obtain the *Leaderspritze*: an interpersonal leadership cocktail.

This manual presents the ingredients necessary to become a good leader. It describes the concrete tools that will enable you to improve your interpersonal skills, including how to give charismatic presentations, organize an effective meeting, manage conflicts, negotiate successfully, and give constructive feedback.

Written by experts in the field of leadership education at university and corporate levels, *Leaderspritze* is based exclusively on scientific research. Whether you are currently in a leadership position or about to become a leader, student, or teacher, this solid and interactive reference, rich in empirical results, anecdotes, scientific theories, and practical tools, will allow you to improve your skills and successfully carry out your responsibilities.

Marianne Schmid Mast is full professor of organizational behavior at the Faculty of Economics and Business (HEC) at the University of Lausanne. She is the author of more than 100 scientific publications in the domains of leadership and social interactions. In 2018 and in 2019, she was named one of the 50 most influential living psychologists in the world (thebestschools.org).

Tristan Palese holds a doctorate in management from the Faculty of Economics and Business (HEC) at the University of Lausanne. His research focuses mainly on the importance of social skills for managers. He is invested in making scientific findings accessible to the larger public and currently works as a training officer and university lecturer.

Benjamin Tur holds a doctorate in management from the Faculty of Economics and Business (HEC) at the University of Lausanne. His research focuses on leadership, charisma, and their effects on individuals. He has strong experience in finance and is currently managing a wealth management firm.

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www.ericgarence.com

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An Introduction to Leaderspritz: A Scientific Cocktail

This book is for women and men in leadership positions, as well as for those who aspire to such positions. Its purpose? To enable you to become an expert in social interactions, capable of managing your staff and your current and future responsibilities.

Our philosophy is simple; just as the *spritz* requires a balanced—almost scientific—blend of ingredients to become a refreshing and light cocktail, leadership is a skillful blend of sensitivity, competence, and expertise. Using practical tools, anecdotes, empirical results, and scientific theories, this book aims to provide a reading firmly grounded in facts, but that is also enjoyable and entertaining.

Unlike books that give subjective advice or biographies of famous leaders, this book is based on rigorous scientific research. In contrast to personal experiences, which are certainly edifying, but always singular, the tools presented here stem from solid empirical evidence and are therefore generalizable beyond the individual case. In other words, there is no bias related to small sample size.

Imagine a Japanese tourist on vacation in the Swiss Alps witnessing the *désalpe* (a traditional festival during which cows, decorated with flower crowns and heavy bells, descend from the mountain pastures to the plain). Is this sample sufficient to learn about the life-style of Swiss cows? In the mind of the passing tourist, will Swiss cows always be adorned with flowers? Such a conclusion would be as hasty as it is far from reality... Yet the same is true for books based on the personal experience of particular leaders, true in their case, but impossible to generalize to all. Scientific studies, however, testing the effectiveness or occurrence of certain behaviors on samples of several hundred people make it possible to avoid such biases.

Another advantage of a science-based book is that the behaviors described have been shown to be effective. Unlike empirical studies, books based on personal experiences very rarely measure the effect of a specific behavior or habit on performance. Yes, a leader's success can be used as a performance indicator; but how to identify among all of the leader's particularities and actions those that have really determined his or her success? How can you be sure that drinking a glass of hot water with lemon (certainly very healthy), removing the door to your office, or developing a certain competency recommended by a famous leader is really the determining factor?

Finally, a science-based book on leadership gives readers greater credibility among those surrounding them. Developing leadership skills is not an easy

endeavor and should not be undertaken alone. It is a difficult path for which leaders need not only the support of their collaborators, but also a willingness on behalf of their superiors to invest in the development of their skills. The scientific studies described in this book provide justification for the need to develop certain skills. If the experience of a successful leader can serve as inspiration, it is essential to have objective and quantifiable facts to address the challenges related to your being or becoming an efficient and successful leader.

This book can be savored like a cocktail, where and how you like it best. You can read it at a sidewalk café, on a couch, in a library, while travelling, alone, or with others. Only one thing really matters, starting at the beginning and learning, step by step, how to become an expert in social interactions.

1 Why Are Leaders Important?

On August 5, 2010, the San José copper mine in Chile collapsed on thirty-three men. Teams from all over the world were mobilized, taking turns to help rescue the survivors. Seventeen days later, a note arrived at the surface: “*Estamos bien el refugio, los 33.*” All the miners were safe but trapped more than two thousand feet underground. Sixty-nine days later, Luis Urzúa was the last man to leave the mine.

Although the miners were saved by the rescue teams, the survival of the thirty-three men owed a lot to Urzúa. As the person responsible for the shift he was the one to coordinate efforts, encourage his men not to give up, and establish a hierarchy by assigning roles based on skills and personality. Florencio Ávalos was appointed second-in-command. Yonni Barrios, who had spent six months at his sick mother’s bedside, became the group’s doctor. Mario Gómez, the oldest, took on the role of spiritual leader and organized prayer times. Mario Sepúlveda, a cheerful and dynamic person, produced a video diary to reassure the families of the trapped. In a few days, the group structured itself into a hierarchy around its leader.

The story of Luis Urzúa and the Chilean miners is not unique. As soon as a group of people comes together, one or more leaders emerge and a hierarchy is established, often in just a few minutes. As in the case of the Chilean miners, small differences are used, often unconsciously, to assign roles within the group. Behaviors, specific knowledge, personality, where a person sits around a table, age or physical appearance: anything can be used to distribute tasks and responsibilities. But why do humans systematically create hierarchies?

The Origin of Hierarchies

Strength comes from unity. This maxim describes in a simple way the evolutionary strategy of many animal species, showing that living together increases the chances of survival. Antelopes, oryx, and even some fish move in groups to improve their chances at spotting predators (fifty eyes are better than two) and escaping from them. Other species, such as wild geese or ibises, fly in formation to optimize their energy consumption and aerodynamics. Still others gather in groups to hunt larger and therefore more nutritious prey. This is particularly the case for wolves and lions.

By choosing to live together, these “social” species enjoy some benefits, but they are also faced with a new challenge: coordination. Imagine for a moment a pack of wolves chasing a moose without coordinating their actions. They all start to pursue their meal, the fastest in front, the slowest at the back. If the moose has done

its cardio workouts properly, it will exhaust its predators and come out of the chase alive. However, if the pack is organized, it will be more dangerous than just its fastest members. Some wolves will force the prey in one direction, while others will cut it off, the whole becoming more effective than the sum of its parts. The assignment of clear roles and the adoption of a hierarchy allows social species to solve important problems such as maximizing access to food sources and minimizing the chances of ending up on someone else's plate.

The human species is, of course, a social species. Like wolves, living in a group has increased our chances of survival, but we have also needed to develop coordination strategies. Hierarchies speed up the group's decision-making process, help to manage conflict, and minimize the risk of diffusion of responsibility.

Imagine being confronted with an unconscious person lying in a crowded street. Would you stop to help the person, or would you continue on your way as if nothing had happened? Chances are that you will take the second option. Why? Like most people, you will probably think that someone else will help. In October 2011, some twenty people passed by a two-year-old girl, Wang Yue, who was dying by the roadside after being run over by a car. A woman finally stopped, unfortunately too late to save the girl. Could this tragic event have been avoided if a hierarchy and clear roles had been established between bystanders on the street? Probably. Law enforcement officials recommend that victims of assault single out a bystander and ask for this person's assistance, rather

than shout “Help!” without targeting a specific person. In companies, this phenomenon of diffusion of responsibility is observed when several employees work on a project without defined responsibilities. Everyone thinks that someone else will contact the supplier and, in the end, no one does. Hierarchies make it possible to clarify everyone’s responsibilities and therefore avoid misunderstandings with potentially disastrous consequences.

However, human societies have evolved; we have developed new forms of organization and communication, as well as new technological means of information exchange. In view of these changes, one might wonder whether hierarchies are still necessary for the proper functioning of a group. Aren’t they the remnants of a bygone past?

Should We Remove Hierarchies?

Removing hierarchical structures and getting rid of managers are new trends adopted by both international organizations and local SMEs. The media frequently publishes articles announcing the end of hierarchies in companies. The term used is “holacracy” or horizontal organization. The removal of hierarchies is driven by a desire to accelerate decision-making and to give employees more autonomy. This levels so-called formal hierarchies, which are illustrated by the titles on business cards or positions in organizational charts: CEO, CFO, Head of Sales, etc. Each position has its responsibilities and powers, its ways of being rewarded and punished.

In 2002, Google got rid of all engineering management positions. The company wanted to give employees more time to work on their projects, while saving time previously spent supervising staff performance. After a few months, there was a long line of people waiting outside the office of Larry Page, one of Google's founders. The reasons? There were relational conflicts to resolve, decisions to approve, and resources to allocate between departments. Google had just discovered that hierarchies could not be removed completely. The experiment was short-lived. Eleven years later, Google still has 5,000 managers and 37,000 employees. Their new strategy? Less pronounced but more relevant hierarchical levels.

Google's experience illustrates a contradiction. On the one hand, the desire to gain time and autonomy by flattening hierarchies; on the other hand, the almost primitive need to refer to a superior to solve interpersonal conflicts, ensure coordination, and allocate resources and responsibilities. As a matter of fact, even in the absence of a formal hierarchy, an informal hierarchy forms systematically with one or more leaders emerging at its head. Those leadership positions are not defined through the usual organizational charts, promotions, or formal appointments, they emerge around certain skills, personalities, or competencies important for the group. The question is therefore not whether there should be hierarchies—there always will be—but what makes hierarchies effective.