



## **Leadership and the Art of Struggle: How Great Leaders Grow Through Challenge and Adversity**

*Steven Snyder, Bill George (Foreword)*

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**All Leaders Face Adversity. Exceptional Leaders Thrive in It.**

Leadership is often a struggle, and yet strong taboos keep us from talking openly and honestly about our difficulties for fear of looking weak and seeming to lack confidence. But Steven Snyder shows that this discussion is vital—adversity is precisely what unlocks our greatest potential.

Using real-life stories drawn from his extensive research studying 151 diverse episodes of leadership struggle—as well as from his experiences working with Bill Gates in the early years of Microsoft and as a CEO and executive coach—Snyder shows how to navigate intense challenges to achieve personal growth and organizational success. He details strategies for embracing struggle and offers a host of unique tools and hands-on practices to help you implement them. By mastering the art of struggle, you’ll be better equipped to meet life’s challenges and focus on what matters most.

## **Leadership and the Art of Struggle: How Great Leaders Grow Through Challenge and Adversity Details**

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Author : Steven Snyder , Bill George (Foreword)

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# **From Reader Review Leadership and the Art of Struggle: How Great Leaders Grow Through Challenge and Adversity for online ebook**

## **Tosin Toshine says**

A good reminder that growth happens at the intersection of struggle and perseverance.

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## **Joseph Iliff says**

Steven Snyder's book provides great examples of how leaders grow through struggle. There were stories about leaders both known and unknown to me, who found ways to adapt to the tension of a new circumstance to become stronger and more resilient. I recommend this for anyone wanting a deeper understanding of leadership values being applied in the real world.

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## **John E. Smith says**

Leadership and The Art of Struggle is all about the leader's struggle and even failure ... and how we must experience and learn from our most challenging moments to grow toward effective leadership.

Works for me, especially the idea that a leader cannot avoid and should not ignore their struggles and failures ... those times when things are not going well, when our actions do not produce the results we want ... when we totally screw up and cannot hide the results.

Steven Snyder knows leadership at a very lofty level, with experience in Microsoft and at his own company, combined with a thoughtful eye for the nuances of an individual's leadership journey. His long-term research into the leadership journey has provided a solid basis for his approach.

Snyder takes aim directly at the myth of failure and struggle as negative aspects of the leadership experience. He identifies what he calls "leadership struggle" as a core component of leadership development. He also discusses the nature of a leader's struggle:

" ...three fundamental conditions that determine the nature of the struggle and serve as its defining elements: change, tensions, and being out of balance."

I found many things to like about this book ...In no particular order, here are some:

**INCLUSIVE APPROACH** ... Snyder draws on mindfulness and emotional intelligence research, as well as some of the current knowledge about neuroscience. The book contains references to a large array of knowledge from various disciplines.

While Snyder has much to offer in terms of valid research which supports his ideas, he also consistently conveys the importance of paying attention to the metaphysical aspects of our leadership and our humanity.

This is a very human approach to leadership.

**INTERWOVEN PERSPECTIVES** ... Snyder connects Daniel Kahneman's Thinking, Fast and Slow concepts, which he calls automatic and reflective thinking, with earlier leadership narrative work by Joe Badaracco of the Harvard Business School. In the process, he creates a model for understanding and learning from our challenges. He knows how to weave concepts together in a most engaging fashion.

**RELATIONAL NARRATIVES** ... Snyder's book is "chock full" of leadership stories from some very accomplished folks with names like Gates and Jobs, along with some others maybe not as well known, but leaders at the loftier levels.

Snyder does a nice job of relating the stories of individual leaders to the models he uses, especially in showing us how one or more of six "scripts" are consistently reflected in a leader's history. "The more self-aware you are, the more capable you will be at adaptively channeling your behavior."

**THE REST OF THE STORY** ... I have not yet really discussed other aspects of Snyder's model, which include those six "scripts" or ways in which we tend to approach and live our leadership lives, and the idea of "adaptive energy" ...

"Adaptive energy is the force that propels you to reach your dreams ... aligns your actions both with the external criteria necessary for success and with your inner values and principles."

I also want to say more about a chart on page 47, which clearly and succinctly details the difference between fixed mindsets and growth mindsets. Tersely put, a leader either sees their abilities and characteristics as fixed and relatively unchangeable or as plastic, elastic, and respondent to learning. I have experienced these concepts in myself and others throughout my working career. Based on my own experiences and reinforced by Snyder's book, one of these mind-sets is much more effective than the other.

Disclaimer: As is often the case, I received a copy of Leadership and the Art of Struggle for review prior to its launch during the week of March 11, 2013. I am free to like or dislike the book. I happen to really like this high quality publication. As is often the case, I plan to purchase several copies to share with some folks who need to hear Steven Snyder's message.

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### **Chrystall Jenkins says**

It's important to remember that even the best leaders are still human. We all struggle in one way or another, including our mentors.

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### **Rebecca Henderson says**

Wow! What a great book ! I enjoyed Steven Snyder's Leadership and the Art of Struggle so much that I had to ration it out in readings, rather than just reading it in 2 or 3 readings, as I easily could have done. I love the in-depth and well-researched examples that the author provides in every chapter; most, if not all of the chapters have examples from multiple people that illustrate Snyder's points. I would consider this to be a scholarly work, but it's very easy to read - it wouldn't intimidate beginning leaders, and I know it will be of

interest to those well-versed in leadership. I wish I'd had it as a resource when I was finishing my MS in Community Leadership - I could have used it as a reference in several classes. My key take away? Snyder writes about Bill Gates habits of surrounding himself with other very intelligent folks, and also being "a voracious reader. Every year he goes off for what he calls 'think week'." We can only ponder the possibilities that go on during "think week"! While I likely won't have a "think week" of my own anytime soon, I am going to schedule a day-long session with myself every month for this type of activity.

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### **Shaun says**

I've read many books on the subject of leadership and this is one of the best I've read. It paints that leadership is a journey to understand your personal struggles and weaknesses, and learn to overcome them. There are exercises and stories shared here that make you think. They help you evaluate where you are today in your life and how to move forward in a positive direction. I plan to re-read this book and complete the exercises, as I just read them during this first reading. The author also shares his website which has many other resources to help you in your journey to become the best leader or good person you desire to be.

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### **Paula Kiger says**

In *Leadership and the Art of Struggle*, Steven Snyder combines examples of leadership struggles faced by leaders in many walks of life (big business, non-profit, politics) with exercises any of us can do to help clarify our path to reaching our own leadership aspirations. Woven throughout the combination of examples and exercises is a reminder of the beautiful utility of mindfulness, enabling anyone to "step off the treadmill of time."

Steven Snyder tells about a time in his life when he had made life decisions based on what seemed best for his interests and aspirations. The job he ended up in as a result of these decisions evaporated less than a year into the venture. This was not good. Steven Snyder talks about the self-pity he felt at the time: "I imagine that my reflective mind was calling out to me, trying to help, but hearing it in the midst of my panic would have been like trying to listen to a whisper in a windstorm."

Steven Snyder explains the difference between the "automatic mind," which "reaches judgements ... quickly but often prematurely" and the "reflective mind," which "challenges assumptions, generates multiple alternatives and evaluates them systematically" on the premise that strengthening the reflective mind can be a key to becoming a stronger leader who in turn helps other leaders grow.

When I was reading this book, I wondered if Steven Snyder had stopped by my office (or had a balcony seat to my mental goings-on!). He tells a fascinating story of Dr. David Abelson, who through a surprising twist of events moved from practicing medicine to being CEO of his large health-care delivery system. In discussing his eventual embrace of the position, Abelson said, "At some point I just heard an internal voice saying that being CEO would be my way of bringing value. It was almost a sense of reverence."

Dr. Abelson and I agree: reverence has to be part of the equation.

I also saw an echo of my own thought process in Steven Snyder's discussion of Frank Russomanno, who was overlooked the first time he applied to be CEO of his organization, Imation (he was asked to stay with the

organization as COO instead). He says, "I didn't think they saw all the good things I'd done for the company."

I want to mention one other concept of Steven Snyder's that resonated so deeply with me: celebrating what's precious.

You don't hear the word "precious" thrown around a lot in the corporate world. But I know it's there for each one of us. I have seen the children's pictures tacked on to the hundreds of cubicles I have seen in visiting various contact centers in several states. I know it's where many people's minds go when a meeting wanders into a counterproductive spiral -- to the things, ideas, goals that are precious to them. The precious things are the passions, actions, and choices that energize us mentally, spiritually, and physically.

I know that for me, there is a windstorm blowing and that hearing that whisper, the one that helps me follow my reflective mind which is trying to tell me where to go, is going to take commitment and, yes, some struggle.

Steven Snyder recounted a conversation in which the eighteenth-century Hasidic rabbi Zusya's teachings were paraphrased:

At the end of your life, God will not ask you why you were not more like Moses. God will ask you why you were not more like Steven.

Yes, it is a struggle to hear that whisper through the wind, to figure out how to be "more like Paula". But a precious calm awaits.

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## **David Rough says**

This book was just okay. Snyder presented some good principles to consider, but he also included some humanistic-based ideas, some strange spiritual insights, and universal thinking that I felt had very restrictive application. He did provide reflective questions at the end of each chapter and encouraged a notebook to journal personal growth and questions.

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## **Soundview Executive Book Summaries says**

*Leadership and the Art of Struggle: How Great Leaders Grow Through Challenge and Adversity* by Steven Snyder was chosen by Soundview Executive Book Summaries as one of the Top 30 Business Books of 2013.

### **THE SOUNDVIEW REVIEW:**

Everyone enjoys a story that involves a hero who triumphs in the face of adversity. The problem for the majority of leaders is that they don't want to play the starring role. The idea of letting others see leaders struggle is off-putting and considered the antithesis of the captain of industry stereotype. This attitude can cause a number of issues, according to author and consultant Steven Snyder. In *Leadership and the Art of Struggle*, Snyder explains why struggle is a vital part of a leader's growth process. His book is now available as a Soundview Executive Book Summary.

One of the worst side-effects of the unwillingness to admit to struggle is that it deprives leaders of, as Snyder puts it, "the candid conversations that could guide them forward." It can also lead to unnecessary comparison between oneself and other seemingly perfect leaders. Through a number of examples, Snyder demonstrates to executives that no leader is invincible and, therefore, not worth devaluing one's self-worth.

Snyder divides the book into three sections: *Becoming Grounded*, *Exploring New Pathways* and *Deepening Adaptive Energy*. Executives may find the section on new pathways particularly helpful. Snyder offers a number of reflective exercises that help leaders directly address problems and attack the situation from a new perspective. Snyder's writing is focused and gives executives a number of options for integrating his techniques.

*Leadership and the Art of Struggle* is a book filled with material that can ease the burden of an executive's challenges.

Soundview's 8-page Executive Book Summary of *Leadership and the Art of Struggle* is available [here](#).

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### **Scott Wozniak says**

He had the chance to really be profound, but he didn't go there. This book mostly just described the obvious, first level of insight. It's things like identifying different "scripts" that leaders in a struggle use. But they don't go much deeper than 1) not listening, changing, and as the problem escalates, burning out - 2) making mistakes at first, but changing before it's too late... It's not wrong, but it isn't particularly insightful, either. For example, I'd love to have learned how to know when your path isn't going to work before it's too late. No--just heard some stories of people who did or didn't change.

If you're a beginning leader, maybe this book would be profound. Keep in mind, I could be skewed off of normal by the dozens and dozens of leadership books I've ready in the last decades.

But even if content were awesome, this feels so much like an academic paper that was cleaned up for book publishing. Too much time listing out all the options. Saying the thesis. Then repeating it in the intro of the next section. Then concluding with a restatement of the thesis (I heard it the first time!), sentences too long and complex...you get the idea.

Summary: meh. I couldn't even finish it (got 2/3 through it).

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### **David Crowley says**

Of course we all know it's a good idea to learn from our mistakes. Easier said than done! This book does a good job of breaking down the process and mindset necessary for leaders to grow in response to the challenges with which we are confronted.

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### **Charissa Ty says**

This book couldn't have come at a better time. I was at a crossroad of two very important decisions and I'm

glad I've read it. It helped me realise that my values and intuition were way more important than I think they were.

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### **Barbara Lovejoy says**

This book was not quite what I expected, but it had some good ideas. I might want to read it again , putting aside my expectations of what I thought it was going to be.

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### **Deborah Parker says**

This book captured powerful concepts of the words that leaders at times fear; struggle, challenge, adversity in an academically inspiring way. For these realities of life and leadership are the very things that once embraced can bring the greatest lessons and widespread success. Steven's use of examples blended the practical aspects of leadership for a variety of industries. The models were extremely useful and well presented.

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### **Laura says**

This book is more touchy-feely than one would expect of a "leadership " book. Snyder does an excellent job of pulling together a number of current theories/practices and applying them to the art of leadership in difficult situations. He incorporates work by Daniel Kahneman (Thinking, Fast and Slow), Carol Dweck's mindset theories, Gerlman's work on emotional intelligence, Bill George's "True North" groups, work on resilience and "mindfulness" and makes them all work together cohesively - so that's good. But the book also has an emphasis on meditation and personal inner peace that's unusual in a work on this subject. Can't decide if that's useful or not. I'll meditate on that.

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