

Book Review for 1/26/03 by Roger Lirely

Title: "The Leadership Secrets of Colin Powell"

Author: Oren Harari

Length: 278 pages.

Price: \$21.95

Reading time: 4-5 hours

Reading rating: 10 (1=very difficult; 10=very easy).

Overall rating: 4 (1=average; 4=outstanding).

Colin Powell is that rare individual who, though not always agreed with, commands admiration and respect from nearly everyone with whom he interacts. Name another person in recent times whose advice and support have been sought by both Democrats and Republicans. Currently the secretary of state in George W. Bush's cabinet, he was the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff under George Bush Senior and was courted as a running mate to Bill Clinton during the 1992 presidential elections. He transcends party lines.

Its not surprising, then, that there have been more than twenty books written about Colin Powell, including his autobiography, My American Journey. It was during the reading of Powell's autobiography that the author, Oren Harari, discerned a "practical, mission-and people-based leadership" that centrally characterizes Secretary Powell. Harari, a professor of management in the McLaren Graduate School of Business, University of San Francisco, identified sixteen leadership lessons espoused by Powell. These lessons were enumerated and explained by Harari in a Management Review article entitled "Quotations from Chairman Powell: A Leadership Primer." It was the wide acceptance of this article and its subsequent endorsement by Powell himself that inspired Harari to expand upon each lesson in this book.

This is a really good book. Each self-contained chapter is devoted to one of the sixteen leadership lessons, including "Know When to Piss People Off," "People Over Plans," "Vigilance in Detail," and "Prepare for Loneliness." The fact that the chapters are self-contained makes it possible for one to read the book in one sitting or to take it off the shelf occasionally and digest a lesson completely. The book could easily be read from back to front and be as valuable as if read traditionally.

The lessons are excellently illustrated with examples, quotations and anecdotes not only from Powell's experiences but also from those of many renowned Fortune 500 business leaders. Though Powell's life experiences are entirely military and government service, the lessons transcend those contexts, and the author makes smooth transitions from the military/political arena into business perspectives.

The only negative aspect of the book is the author's somewhat annoying "name-dropping." His references to business and political leaders is helpful when it is anecdotal or illustrative but, too often, the author strains to reference people without reason. It's almost as if he is attempting to impress the reader with who he knows or to impress those mentioned by mentioning them.

This annoyance aside, the book is a valuable reference for anyone interested in improving leadership skills.

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