

## PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW



Book Title: ***HBR Leader's Handbook: Make an Impact, Inspire Your Organization and Get to the Next Level***

Authors: **Ron Ashkenas and Brook Manville**

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Reviewer: **Mark Cardullo**    Review Date: Sep 2019

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### Introduction

Ron Ashkenas' and Brook Manville's *Harvard Business Review Leader's Handbook* is true to its title in that it should be used by any new or seasoned leader as a reference guide for strengthening leadership skills. Their structure of the book, the areas they focus on, and examples they provide, allow readers to readily come back time and again to revisit key messages. Their examples of real-life executive leadership include many practical applications which reinforce concepts from each chapter. As with many other books published by *Harvard Business Review*, the book also guides curious readers to areas for further discovery. Overall, this guide meets and exceeds its intent to assist in the journey towards effective, contemporary leadership.

### Structure of the Book

The *Handbook* outlines six leadership concepts tied together as a circular path. The book begins with a focus on what many major leadership guides focus on: setting a vision. While this is not a unique position among texts, the book establishes the task of building a vision as the primary building block for leaders to drive both personal and organizational growth. Many of the remaining chapters point to leadership's vision development as providing a roadmap for future decision-making. This construct is the glue that ties the succeeding focus areas together through the remainder of the reader's experience.

Typically, any discussion of establishing visions usually is followed by a detailed review of how to develop organizational Strategies. *Handbook* is no different in but this is where the book begins to show that it is a guide for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Leaders. In Chapter 2, "Developing a Strategy", the writers introduce the idea that leaders can benefit from both Lean and Agile concepts. By using these tools, the book illustrates to leaders that focusing on customer and employee engagement, cycled learning, and supporting scope evolution are more effective ways to lead the modern workforce.

The authors revisit these concepts in the following chapters which reinforces that this is a handbook for 21<sup>st</sup> Century leaders.

Throughout the remainder of the book, the view shifts to building a team with the right talent, focus on achieving results, focus on driving the future, and finally, the most personable chapter in the book, focus on leadership oneself. The final chapter, "Leading Yourself", adds a unique touch compared to many other leadership books. It recommends that to be effective, a leader must practice patience, humility, courageousness, and several other characteristics that are usually left out of standard leadership books. In the end, the authors provide direction that leaves readers with the message that true leadership is not only about guiding others, it's about guiding oneself to guide others.

### **Highlights: What I liked**

Multiple features of the book are worth mentioning as they go beyond standard handbook documentation. For example, each chapter includes a "Questions To Consider" which helps the reader recap and recall key concepts presented in the preceding chapter. These are succinct but also detailed enough to likely result in readers dog-earing their books for easy future reference.

The overall flow of the book also makes it an easy read but it also provides continuity through strong transition from each major concept to the next. This keeps readers interested and open to each succeeding section.

The use of examples from multiple industries and executive levels helps improve the relatability of the information presented, again maintaining a high level of interest for the reader.

Overall, the content of the handbook ties neatly with the delivery method ensuring leaders will get the most out of this book.

### **Who might benefit from this book?**

Although this handbook is focused on delivering its message to several tiers of leadership, it is ideal for those who want to move to the next level in their career. The book provides many tidbits that could be used for reference as the leader expands their influence. Readers will also benefit by the handbook's clear tie back to other sources of knowledge and information. Throughout the chapters, other references are cited and the appendix expands on these further. Overall, the information provided in the text are presented in a way that helps those who have already been exposed to the concepts start refining how they become more proficient in their execution. In the end, many will find this handbook extremely practical but those whose careers are poised for acceleration will truly benefit the most.

## Conclusion

If someone is expecting a standard guide on leadership, they will be pleasantly surprised as they read through the chapters. This book differentiates itself by being more personable and modern than others as it integrates multiple concepts that have been refined only in the past twenty years. But, it also covers the 21<sup>st</sup> Century leadership landscape without being just a delivery mechanism for long lists and uninteresting examples. The book's primary message should leave readers with an understanding that if they really put themselves into all they do as a leader, the organization and the leader will be difficult to separate. What this means is that the best organizations reflect the values, aspirations, and courage of their leaders. That is what Leadership is all about.

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For more about this book, go to: <https://store.hbr.org/product/the-harvard-business-review-leader-s-handbook-make-an-impact-inspire-your-organization-and-get-to-the-next-level/10158>

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## About the Reviewer



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**Mark Cardullo** has been managing technical projects and resources for over 25 years. His background is in Industrial Engineering and has MS degrees in Engineering Management and Manufacturing Engineering. Mark's career includes working in the Semiconductor, Defense, Medical Device and Food Technology industries. He lives in the Dallas-Fort Worth area and is active in the PMI Dallas chapter.

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