



chapter 10

JIM KOUZES on **Becoming a Leader**

Jim Kouzes, a renowned leader in leadership development, is the co-author of the award-winning book, The Leadership Challenge. Now in its third edition, the book is a Business Week bestseller with over one million copies sold in 14 languages. Jim is also an executive fellow at the Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship at the Leavey School of Business, Santa Clara University. The Wall Street Journal has cited Jim as one of the 12 most requested “non-university executive-education providers” to U. S. companies. A popular speaker, Jim shares lessons about leadership that have arisen from over 20 years of original research.

What do leadership and personal branding have in common? Based on Jim Kouzes’ own experience and research, this chapter offers practical answers.

Co-branding as collaboration

For Jim Kouzes, a brand is a total *experience*. “It’s not something that you stick on the outside of a package,” he says. “It’s something that comes from the inside. To understand your brand you have to understand your own life experiences and the meaning of those experiences.”

His book *The Leadership Challenge* was shaped by his life experiences, and is the result of many collaborations. The most important of those partnerships is the one with Barry Posner, Dean of the Leavey School of Business at Santa Clara University. Barry is his co-author, colleague and best friend. They’ve been writing and working together since 1981 – more than 20 years. While they certainly have their individual identities, their brand is a collaborative creation.

“There’s not one shred of evidence that leadership – or that achieving anything great – is a solo act,” says Jim. “I once asked Don Bennett, the first amputee to climb Mt. Rainier, to tell me the most important lesson he learned in making that famous climb. Without hesitation, he said, ‘You can’t do it alone.’ That phrase has stuck with me for two decades. Today, I’m convinced of it more than ever. You can’t do it alone. I certainly know that from my own experience. Barry and I have found from our research involving thousands of leaders that those who score higher on collaboration are more effective in meeting the demands of their jobs. I’d be a hypocrite if I didn’t live that value in my own life.”

That collaborative spirit is a part of every thing Jim does. Before publishing anything that will have both their names on it, Barry and Jim discuss everything they write. They split all the royalties 50/50. Jim says with sincerity, “There’s no such thing as saying, ‘I’m going to write 80% of this so I’m going to get 80% of the royalties.’ Partnerships fall apart when that happens. For us, it’s always been 50/50. We have always known in our hearts that we couldn’t do this without the other person. Developing our brand and being successful in the marketplace

has been a collaborative effort.”

At the same time, while they split the work and the rewards 50/50, their work has to be of one voice. It has to be in harmony. If they're out of tune or out of synch with each other, they can't create a compelling product. If someone could say, “Oh, Jim wrote that part, and Barry wrote that other part,” they wouldn't have a unified brand. Collaboration has to yield a unified experience to result in a successful brand. To ensure that their writing speaks with one voice, there's a lot of back-and-forth and give-and-take. The process may take longer, but the result is something that neither could have produced by acting alone. “That doesn't mean that we sit side-by-side and write each sentence together,” Jim notes, “nor does it mean that we've submerged our individuality. We just learned how to build on each other's strengths and use our talents to better effect through collaboration.”

Jim's affinity for leadership goes back a long way

Jim grew up in the suburbs of Washington, D.C. Because of his proximity to the nation's capital, he was immersed in American politics and the making of world history. From the time he was a sophomore in high school, he shared his home with many foreign students from the Middle East, South America, Europe, Asia and Africa. His mother continued this tradition after his father passed away in 1977, and he and his family are very proud of the fact that over 100 young men and women have called their house “home.” This has blessed him with the opportunity to live, work and play with people of many different backgrounds, religions, nationalities and belief systems. This experience is reflected in his brand.

Growing up in the nation's capital also afforded him some other wonderful opportunities. January 20, 1961, for example, was a life-changing day. That was the date of John F. Kennedy's inauguration, and Jim was one of a dozen Eagle Scouts selected to serve in John F. Kennedy's Honor Guard at the presidential

inauguration. That day is burned in his memory, and he points to it as one of those seminal moments when he knew he had found his calling to be of service. Inspired by Kennedy and other leaders of the 1960s, Jim joined the Peace Corps after college and served as a volunteer from 1967 through 1969.

The Peace Corps introduced Jim to the realities of living in another culture and speaking another language. “A friend once told me,” Jim says, “that to speak another language fluently is to have another soul. I came away from the Peace Corps

If you follow your heart,
you will be led wisely.

with a profound understanding and awareness that we’re all connected. We can be of one soul, but we have to listen with our eyes and our hearts.” He adds, “The profound possibility

also exists that we can realize a dream of peace and freedom. I learned, however, that achieving peace and freedom is a struggle. We all have to work very hard at it.”

The Peace Corps also introduced Jim to social psychology and applied behavioral sciences, the disciplines that underlie leadership and organizational behavior. “Many people think leadership is firmly grounded in individual psychology. While Freud and Jung have certainly influenced the field, the more significant contributions have come from social psychology,” Jim notes. During his Peace Corps training and immediately afterwards, Jim had the chance to study with some of the most notable experts in the field.

Putting leadership to the test

Jim became active in the Organizational Development (OD) Network in 1975, and he chaired the 1980 national conference in San Francisco. As chairperson, he wanted to do something different. Being a strong believer in collaboration, he decided to put his values to the test.

He and his committee members opened up the planning

process to everyone who wanted to be involved. They let every member of the OD Network in the Bay Area know that if they wanted to be involved in the planning of this conference they were welcome to contribute in whatever way fit their own timeframe, availability, talents and aspirations allowed. Ultimately, over 300 people came together to plan and execute the conference. It was the largest conference of the OD Network to date and it brought in significant revenue. That event taught him an important lesson: Collaboration is successful if (1) you believe in it, and (2) you use a process that can involve people in a meaningful way. He considers the event to be one of his best personal leadership experiences. It was a turning point in his life.

One of the presenters at the conference was André Delbecq. André later became the dean of the Leavey School of Business at Santa Clara University, and he asked Jim if he would consider taking a job there. In 1981, Jim became director of the Executive Development Center at Santa Clara University. That job connected him to Barry Posner. They shared an affinity for the same kinds of issues and they were both attracted to the subject of leadership, so they decided to team up. Their joint work began as an intensive research project on leadership, and the academic setting helped to shape another characteristic of their brand – their emphasis on rigorous research.

Jim and Barry were troubled by some of their research into leadership and corporate culture because they found assertions that leadership only existed in excellent companies. They had both observed that there are good leaders in bad companies and bad leaders in good companies. “Leadership is not the private reserve of a few charismatic men and women who happened to join a few organizations,” Jim points out. “First of all, that’s a demographic impossibility. Secondly, to say that leadership is confined to a very few excellent companies is a denial of all the great leadership that exists outside of them.”

Jim and Barry looked around and noted that there are

leaders in all countries, all organizations, all political systems and all religions. “There are youth leaders, senior leaders, team leaders, leaders who get paid and leaders who volunteer. Leadership knows no racial or religious bounds, no ethnic or cultural borders. The idea of learning about leadership by studying only a few exceptional corporate leaders was

“What are the common leadership practices of many different leaders from varied backgrounds?” That question became the foundation of the book *The Leadership Challenge*.

wrongheaded,” says Jim. He and Barry wanted to know *the common and transferable leadership practices of many different leaders from varied backgrounds*. They’ve taken a more universal approach to leadership, not one that’s focused on corporations or on leaders at the very top of the

hierarchy. They developed a strong belief – which is backed by research – that leadership is everyone’s business.

Barry and Jim set out to create a valid and reliable model that was simple, useable and practical. They decided to study leadership using a “Personal Best Leadership Experiences” methodology. They asked people to tell a story about a time when they did their best as leaders. They figured that if they looked at enough stories, they would find common themes across those stories, and then they might be able to make some generalizations about leadership. From there they could test the hypothesis in a variety of settings and see if they held up empirically. The outcome was *The Leadership Challenge*.

Brand power comes from substance

While Jim and Barry had strong affiliations with Santa Clara University, they wanted to reach beyond academia and write in a style that would address a broader audience. Most students of the executive program at the business school were in business settings. They wanted a book that was effortless to read and geared toward the everyday leader and manager.

They began with the assumption, based on their research, that “leadership is everyone’s business,” and approached their writing from that perspective.

Barry and Jim strongly believed in their work. They were in love with the subject matter and hoped people would read their message. They had no idea that the book would sell as well as it did, but they did have an aspiration early on that when people thought about leadership, one of the three books that would come to mind would be *The Leadership Challenge*. While this was their aspiration, it was never about the money. It was their passion that drove them. The book was a vehicle for the expression of their passion and research.

It was at least fifteen years after the book was published that they started to talk about their work as a brand. In the latter part of the 1990s, in preparation for the third edition of *The Leadership Challenge*, their publisher commissioned a study to find out why people bought their book, why people bought business books in general, and what readers wanted from the book. The data helped them define what it was about Barry Posner and Jim Kouzes and their work that was compelling for the readers. Building a brand was not something they set out to create. They had established a brand without really knowing it. They worked because they loved their work, but over time, as people experienced them and their work, a brand emerged.

The experience creates the brand.

Jim is certain that if somebody starts out wanting to become a brand, it’s less likely to happen than if they just be who they are. It’s all about integrity; the opposite of integrity is hypocrisy. “You can’t create something that you’re not. You’re just acting; just playing a part. Without substance, you won’t survive very

A genuine brand has to be rooted in a passion or cause or something of deep commitment.

long as a brand because it becomes about ego, about me, wonderful me. A genuine brand has to be rooted in a passion, a cause or a deep commitment. Being on the cover of *Fortune* magazine does not make a person a brand. That kind of iconography is not what branding is. You've got to start out with a passion for something. That passion becomes magnetic to people. People are drawn to it. There's a point at which you have to say, 'That's our original work, not somebody else's.' When you are original and you have your own unique voice, the audience doesn't even have to see you to know who is behind the work. When someone says Madonna or The Beatles or Bob Dylan or Steven Spielberg or Daffy Duck, you probably get images in your mind. You would be able to identify these characters without prompting."

At the Cinequest Film Festival in San Jose, California, Jim listened to a filmmaker comment on his recently released film. After being rejected by traditional Hollywood financing agencies, he financed his film through friends and family. In response to an audience question about why he did it, the director said, "This film had to be made." People who are successful and established in a field share this trait of zeal and obsession. They *have* to do it. That's what it means to be driven. They are going after their passion. It's in their soul. It's who they are. It's not just turning out books or doing work to make a buck. It's about long-term sustainability. You have to love what you're doing. It has to be what gets you up in the morning.

To Jim, Peter Drucker is an excellent example of this point. How much time has Peter Drucker ever spent asking himself about his brand? Probably not much. Yet he's still the best-known writer and management consultant in the industry. Why is that? Peter just does what is important to him ... what's in

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his heart ... and people respond.

Whenever Jim works on a project, he asks himself a lot of questions about why he's doing it: "What's my aspiration? What's my passion? What drives me? What's important to me?" He adds, "If I'm not successful in selling a particular book, I don't feel badly because I'm doing what I love to do. Otherwise, if I am successful, I consider myself to be blessed. I also know that our success is a function of many things, including a lot of hard work and some good luck."

Liberate the leader in everyone

When Jim conducted the first residential workshop using their new research on leadership, one of his co-trainers was Ann Bowers, who at the time was vice president of human resources at Apple Computer. Before they started the workshop, Ann said to him, "Jim, you write about vision. You advise leaders to have a vision. What's *your* vision?" Jim responded without hesitation, "To liberate the leader in everyone."

Leaders don't get appointed. It's earned through behavior. You only become a leader when other people want to follow you.

Jim goes on to explain that leadership isn't about a title or position. "Just because you have the title of president doesn't make you a leader. Leaders don't get appointed. It's earned through their behavior. Leadership is defined more by someone's constituents than by that person. People only become leaders when other people want to follow them."

Leadership is a team sport. There is no such thing as a leader who got anything done alone. It's a myth that a person on a white horse can ride into town and save the people. That belief system has done more harm than any other leadership myth around.

The most trusted source on becoming a better leader

When they wrote their first book, Jim and Barry's approach to writing was more intuitive than trained. Over the years, however, they've noticed a pattern in their writing. They've developed a process that they refer as the Six P's:

1. Point of View

Each chapter of their book clearly communicates a point of view. Barry and Jim articulate the theme of the section in a sentence or two. It's like a good song. There's one basic message, all the rest is a variation on the theme. They've got reams of data and thousands of stories. Then they summarize all that in a few key messages, the points of view.

2. Practices

They ask practical questions: What do leaders actually do? What's the behavior that demonstrates the point of view? This part is action-oriented.

3. Principles

Underlying the points of view and the practices are important guiding principles, learned from years of research. They want their readers to know the principles as well as the prescriptions. To expect people to buy into a message, telling them to do this or do that is not enough. They deserve an explanation about human and organizational behavior without academic jargon.

4. Proof

What will make a person a more effective leader? What's the evidence that if you do something it will matter? What's the proof that people care about this? Their work is based on solid research and evidence. Their personal credibility is based on that research. Audiences have the right to see proof that what is said works.

5. Parables

As much as Barry and Jim love research, they understand the power and influence of stories. People are more likely to remember stories than they are to remember numbers. The data provides credibility, but the story teaches. Stories provide examples of the practice and principles in action. Whenever they give a speech or write, they always give an example of a real leader doing real things in order to illustrate the point.

In the business world, long-term sustainability is about getting results.

6. Prescriptions

Their work is prescriptive, not just descriptive. Barry and Jim provide prescriptions in the form of practical action tools. Ultimately, managers and leaders have to go out and put this into practice. In their publisher's research on why people buy business books, the number one thing that the target audience wants is results. They want to be successful – and unless you can help your audience succeed, your probability of establishing a brand is not great. In the business world, long-term sustainability is about getting results. You have to make it practical in order for people to use it. To be responsive to the practical, pragmatic, results-oriented part, they ask themselves, “Would I want to read this book?”

The Six-P method helps Barry and Jim check the quality of their own work, and it differentiates them from the crowd. It's practical, it's credible, and it's easy to understand. They want to communicate in a way that makes people say, “Oh, I see how that works and how I can put it into practice in my own life.”

Jim was talking with Ken Blanchard about how Ken's work has endured the test of time. People still buy his *One Minute Manager*, which came out in 1981. Jim asked Ken why their

work has had such longevity. Ken said, “When it sticks around for 20 years, I call it the truth.” Jim wouldn’t be quite that bold, but Ken has a point. When something stands the test of time, it’s “tried and true.” You can count on it.

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Jim and Barry have stood the test of time because their work is research-based. They feel confident in putting their brand on the cover of a book: “The most trusted source on becoming a better leader.” Barry and Jim stand by that statement. It’s supported by evidence. It has integrity.

People learn from stories

Not too long ago Jim was in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Santa Fe probably has more fine art galleries per square mile than any other place in the United States, with the exception of New York City. When touring the art galleries, he would stop and ask about the artist, their background and the story behind the painting. Jim has always had this kind of curiosity. He wants to know the story behind everything.

“We all love to hear stories,” Jim says. “The sense of being around the collective campfire is exhilarating. It’s the reason we read novels and go to movies. We want to be caught up in the experience. It’s a universal phenomenon. Story telling is one of the oldest ways in the world to convey values and ideals shared by a community. Before the written word, stories were the means for passing along the important lessons of life. We know how important they are in teaching children, but sometimes we forget how important they are to adults. The intention of stories is not just to entertain. Oh, they’re intended to do that for sure, but they’re also intended to teach. Good stories move us. They touch us, they teach us, and they cause us to remember. They enable the listener to put the behavior in context and to understand what has to be done in

that context in order to live up to expectations.”

Jim uses an example from research to illustrate the power of stories. Joanne Martin and Melanie Powers, organizational sociologists from Stanford University, studied the impact of stories on MBA students, a group that is often numbers-driven, highly competitive and skeptical. Martin and Powers compared the impact of four methods of convincing the students that a particular company truly practiced a policy of avoiding layoffs. In one situation, Martin and Powers used only a story to persuade people. In the second, they presented statistical data that showed that the company had significantly lower involuntary turnover than its competitors. In the third, they used the statistics and the story, and in the fourth, they used a straightforward policy statement made by an executive of the company.

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Which method do you think was most believable to the MBA students? The story-only option was found to be the most believable, followed by story plus data. Statistical data was third, and, as you would expect, the policy statement was the least believable. It makes you wonder why organizations issue a policy statement without presenting an example of how it works in real life. The important point is that stories are not only the most engaging form of communication; they are also the most believable.

Leadership is a personal relationship

In presentations and workshops, Jim often conducts a brief survey with his audience. He lists a number of categories of individuals – teacher, coach, parents, family members, business leader, political leader, entertainer – and asks the audience to indicate from which category (and they get only one) they

would say their most important leadership role models come from in their own lives.

Then he shows them the results of a study done with both 18–32 year olds and older adults. The research suggests that people, especially younger people, find role

Leadership is a relationship between those who *aspire* to lead and those who *choose* to follow.

models first and foremost among family members. The next top categories are teachers, coaches and community leaders. In other words, leadership role models don't just come from business.

It's about relationships with people who are close to you, relationships that are often formed early in life. Leadership is a relationship; it's personal, and it's emotional. People most distant from us are not role models, despite what the press might report. The people closest to us are much more likely to be those we admire and respect.

As Jim notes, “Leadership is a relationship between those who *aspire* to lead and those who *choose* to follow.” Those words – aspire to lead and choose to follow – are carefully selected, because leadership is always an aspiration, never a given. It's in the eye of the beholder. People choose to follow you. They don't follow you if they don't want to. Even if you're in a position of power and influence, people choose whether to put forth more or less energy based on the quality of their relationship with you.

Credibility comes from an emotional connection

If leadership is a relationship, then what is the foundation of leadership? According to Jim and Barry's research, it's *credibility*. “If you don't believe in the messenger, you won't

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believe the message.” What is credible behavior? Credibility is built when you walk the talk, practice what you preach, put

your money where your mouth is and do what you say you will do. These are the everyday phrases people use to define credibility. Each one of these phrases suggests two things: first, you have to have something to say, and second, you have to back up the words with your actions. That leads to perhaps one of the most unique things that Barry and Jim say: “You cannot do what you say if you have nothing to say. In other words you have to first be clear about what you want to say.”

In order to get the highest levels of commitment and achievement, there must be a connection between leaders and their constituents. It goes back to the relationship piece. The first step in the process of becoming a leader is to figure out what you value and what you believe in. The next step is developing a shared vision. That requires a lot of personal reflection, a lot of soul searching, because the evidence tells us that commitment to a cause is driven not by an external force, but by an internal force.

Brands mobilize people. They get people to take action because there's a connection between them and the message.

To be a believable spokesperson for an organization's vision, it has to resonate with your own vision. You will not be that credible, articulate or passionate as a leader unless you know that the shared vision fits with your core values and beliefs. As Jim observes, “If I'm going to put a tattoo on my body that tells the world who I am – what I stand for, what symbolically represents me — if I'm going to make a mark, that mark has to be my mark, not someone else's mark. It has to be about me and what's important to me. The flip side is that it has to be important to 'us.' We talk about leaders as mediums between the vision and the people. For example, Martin Luther King talked about freedom. His life was about freedom and justice. He wasn't the first person in the world to talk about freedom and justice. However, he did it in a way that mobilized people. That's what brands do. Brands mobilize people. They get people to take action because there's

a connection between them and the message.”

Brands lose their appeal once they lose the connection with the customer. Too often, when people talk about personal branding they make the mistake of thinking about “Me, me, wonderful me!” Sure, your clients want to know that you are a credible professional, but they’ll be turned off when branding turns into grandstanding. Instead, talk instead about how your brand connects with their values, their needs and their context.

Plenty of brands bring up negative images in people’s minds. When brands become so self-centered they begin to lose their edge, you’ve stopped listening to the customer and stopped hearing the feedback that they’re giving you. It’s a sure way to kill the brand.

Jim is convinced that a brand needs to be a connection between the idea and the people. People are making a connection with Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner and with their work – an emotional connection. That’s critical. The whole concept of branding is that it has to be important to other people. Just putting your smiling face on the cover of your book or promotional material is a meaningless exercise unless it builds an emotional connection. It has to resonate with others. Then people will want to follow, want to buy, and want to use the product or service. Again, credibility is the foundation. All you have to offer is your credibility.

Eight Insights from Jim Kouzes on Becoming a Leader

1. Leadership is everyone's business. So is personal branding.
2. Leadership isn't about a title or something that you get by somebody appointing you. It's earned through your behavior. It's defined more by the constituents than by you. You only become a leader when other people want to follow you.
3. Be in love with "something." Care deeply about your message. That becomes magnetic, and people are drawn to it.
4. A brand has to be built on substance; it has to be rooted in passion, a meaningful cause or deep commitment. If there is no substance, the brand will not sustain.
5. In the business world, long-term sustainability is about getting results. Give your client results. Give them practical tools that will help them succeed.
6. Be credible. Credibility is built when you walk the talk, practice what you preach, put your money where your mouth is, do what you say you will do. It's the foundation for people to follow you and want to buy your service.
7. Understand your internal force – know what your beliefs are, what your values are, what you aspire to, what excites you, what's important to you, how you do things, the end results of what you want, the means and ends. That requires a lot of personal reflection, a lot of soul searching. Evidence tells us that commitment to a cause is driven not by an external force, but by an internal force.
8. Build an emotional connection between the client and your message. That's what brands do. Brands mobilize people and get people to take action because of that emotional connection.

Jim Kouzes' Viewpoints

On Leadership Practices

Leaders engage in Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership®:

1. *Model the Way*

Titles are granted, but it's your behavior that wins your respect.

Leaders must find their own voice, and then they must clearly and distinctively give voice to their values.

Leaders' deeds are far more important than their words in determining their level of commitment. Words and deeds must be consistent.

2. *Inspire a Shared Vision*

Leaders cannot commend commitment; they can only inspire it.

Leaders envision an uplifting and ennobling future.

Leaders ignite the flame of passion in others by expressing enthusiasm for the compelling vision of their group. Leaders communicate their passion through vivid language and an expressive style.

3. *Challenge the Process*

Leaders are willing to venture out into the unknown. They search for opportunities to innovate, grow and improve.

Leaders recognize and support good ideas. They are willing to challenge the system to get new products, processes, services and systems adopted. They take risks and experiment, learning from their inevitable mistakes.

4. *Enable Others to Act*

Leadership is a team effort. Leaders foster collaboration and build trust; they make it possible for others to do good work.

When people are trusted and have more discretion, more authority and more information, they're much more likely to use their energies to produce extraordinary results.

Leaders strengthen others and turn their constituents into leaders themselves.

5. *Encourage the Heart*

Exemplary leaders understand the need to recognize contributions. They focus on clear standards, expect the best, pay attention and personalize recognition.

Exemplary leaders also celebrate the victories of teams, building a sense of community.

On the Future of Leadership

The domain of leaders is the future. The most significant contribution leaders make is not simply today's bottom line; it's the long-term development of people and institutions so they can adapt, change, prosper and grow.

Leadership is hard work, and it's also great fun. Leadership is about caring, about heart and about love.

In the end, leadership development is ultimately self-development. Meeting the leadership challenge is a personal – and a daily – challenge for all of us.¹

Simon Says:



Read *The Leadership Challenge* by Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner.

The Leadership Challenge, a modern classic on leadership, is about how leaders mobilize others to want to get extraordinary things done in organizations. It's about the practices leaders use to transform values into actions, visions into realities, obstacles into innovations, separateness into solidarity, and risk into rewards. It has been required reading for many students pursuing an MBA, and for good reason. It's practical and the points are very direct, well explained and easy to follow. These ideas have stood the test of time, and are well worth reading and applying.