



## CNBC Book Review Questions

Excerpted and adapted from: Annie McKee, Richard Boyatzis and Frances Johnston. *Becoming a Resonant Leader: Develop Your Emotional Intelligence, Renew Your Relationships, and Sustain Your Effectiveness*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, March 2008.

### Preface IX

We have been studying leadership for many years and are often asked why we think it is so important. To us, there is no nobler goal than to lead people to excellence, fulfillment and collective achievement. Our lives, society and our planet have changed rapidly and unpredictably in recent years – and this is likely just the tip of the iceberg. If we are to find our way to a better world, a more stable environment, and societies where all people have access to life’s gifts, we need people who can see beyond today, spark hope instead of despair, and draw others into an intentional journey of transformation. We need more great leaders to emerge who think and act in new ways—women and men who are not afraid to travel the road less taken, which requires vision and courage.

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Most people understand *what leaders are supposed to do*. They know what the job entails: scan the environment; build a strategy; organize, execute and manage resources to get the job done.

Far fewer people understand *how to lead*: how to mobilize energy in people, teams and groups; how to inspire and motivate through hope, vision, meaning and purpose; how to increase productivity while also releasing people’s talent, creativity and resilience; how to build a resonant culture that calls for everyone’s best.

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Resonant leadership is common sense. Why, then, are there so few truly great resonant leaders in our companies and communities? Think of your own experience: how many good managers, bosses, leaders have you experienced? How many bad? What’s the ratio of good to bad? What impact have these people had on you and others?

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You may be asking yourself, “Why were so many of my bosses so bad?” Most of these poor leaders are not evil or cruel. Most are not stupid – quite the contrary. In fact, our experience with leaders has supported an optimistic view of leadership: most people intend to lead responsibly in the service of the common good. Very few people get up in the morning intending to do harm to the people who depend on them.

Why, then, do so many good people fall short of their potential? It might have something to do with people’s beliefs about what leaders should be and do. In fact, there are a few myths about leadership that are, sadly, widely held to be true. These myths drive people to adopt practices that ruin cultures and demotivate people to the point that it is unlikely – even cognitively impossible – for them to sustain performance over time. As we look at each one a bit more deeply in the next section, consider what impact these myths and the truths about good leadership have on you.

**Common Myths and the Truth about Leadership**

<u>Myth One</u> – Smart is good enough	<u>The Truth</u> – Intellect and technical knowledge are baseline and do not differentiate great leaders. Emotional and social intelligence makes the difference.
<u>Myth Two</u> – Your mood does not matter	<u>The Truth</u> – Emotions are contagious and a leader can create resonance and a climate that supports success, or leaders can spread emotions that create a dissonant, unproductive and unhealthy climate.
<u>Myth Three</u> – Great leaders thrive on constant pressure	<u>The Truth</u> – Sacrifice and power stress are inherent in the leader’s role. The best leaders manage the pressure through adopting practices of renewal.



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If you are like most people, you have developed ways to cope with the everyday pressures of your job, and the longer-term threat posed by power stress and the Sacrifice Syndrome. Many of us rely on personal resilience and the coping mechanisms we learned and that we were rewarded for as we grew into adulthood. Some people rely on personal strengths to carry us through crises, and oftentimes this works for a while. But any strength taken to the extreme can become a weakness. Some leaders' intensity contributes to their inability to modulate emotions or read the environment. They hate losing and want badly to perform well. When the situation becomes challenging their stress goes up disproportionately and they cope by doing what they always do—pushing them and others as hard as possible.

Other people simply shut down when we feel an emotion or have a thought that we feel is intolerable or scary such as, “I need to exercise or I might have a heart attack,” or “I need to work less because my kids are really upset with me,” or “This project will be cancelled because I can't influence my boss.” These thoughts increase our anxiety. Usually we have some intellectual understanding that we need to change something, and we may even have the emotional desire, but somehow we can't open up and deal with what is happening—we are stuck and resistant to change.

It actually makes sense: Resistance is about protection. But while resistance can decrease our anxiety momentarily, it can also cause us to act in ways that are actually self destructive. It's paradoxical and dangerous.

So, it is important to know how and when our coping mechanisms are actually unhealthy resistance. Most of us have tendencies that drive how we deal with stress and resist anxiety. These tendencies are called defensive routines, and we adopt them to help us feel more in control.