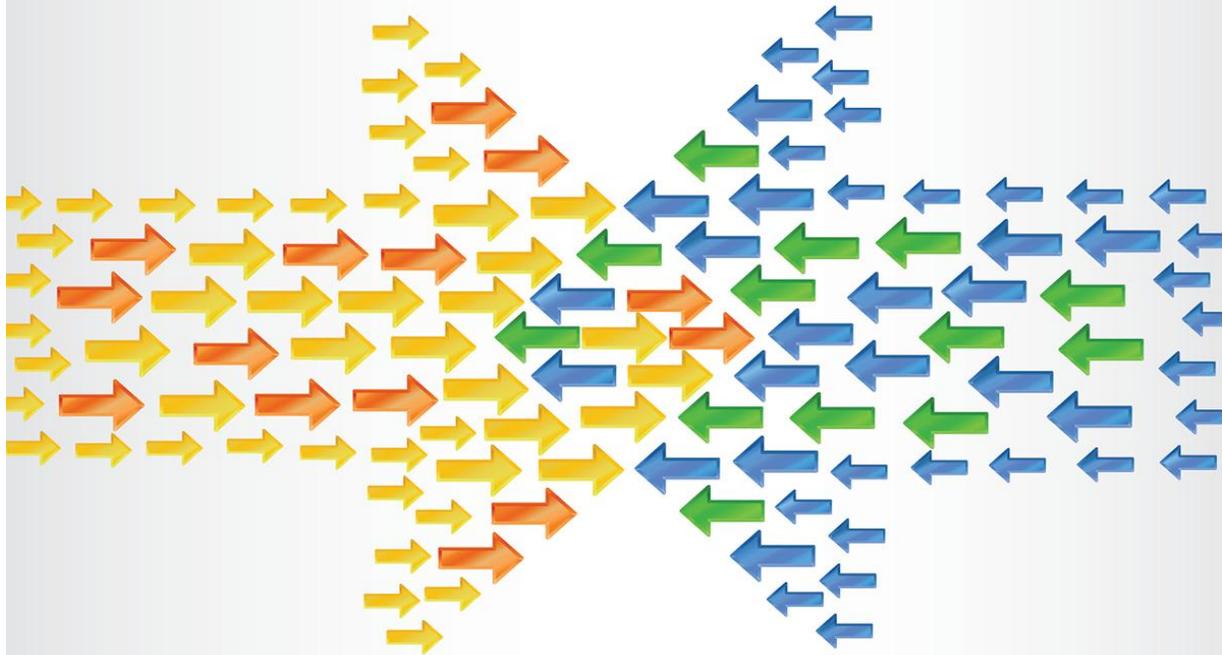


“One of the great strengths of a non-profit organization is that people don’t work for a living, they work for a cause.”

—Peter F. Drucker

NO-NONSENSE Non-Profit



Leadership Principles for
Church & Charity

PETER DARCY

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A successful man is one who can lay a firm foundation with the bricks that others have thrown at him.

~David Brinkley

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I should be sorry if I only entertained them; I wished to make them better.

~George Frideric Handel

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A ship in harbor is safe – but that is not what ships are built for.

~John A. Shedd

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There are two way to do something: the right way, and again.

~Navy SEALs

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Life is a game of cards. The hand that is dealt you represents determinism; the way you play it is free will.

~Jawaharlal Nehru

When Leaders Are Absent

Like many good things in life, we only appreciate the blessings of leadership when we are deprived of them.

Most of us take leaders for granted because leadership is often a behind-the-scenes, thankless job, the details of which few people see. We mourn the loss of good leadership when it is *absent* because only its absence gives us a

clue as to how much leaders do for us in silent ways while the rest of us cruise along on the surface of life enjoying the benefits of their hard work. If you ask yourself how important good leadership is to any human venture, you won't have to look far for an answer. Let's take just one famous example: the *Titanic*.

Virtually everyone in the Western world knows the story of the epic *Titanic* disaster in 1912. It was, of course, fundamentally a business venture for the British company, the White Star Line. It was not a charitable mission, but the leadership lessons we can derive from that tragedy are striking. Starting with the leadership failures surrounding the *Titanic* misadventure, let's begin with the most serious.

Leadership Failure #1 – dereliction of duty:

Captain Edward J. Smith, an experienced British Royal Navy officer, drove the *Titanic* "full steam ahead" through an ocean full of icebergs with the ambition of setting a new trans-Atlantic passage record to New York. That act easily qualifies Captain Smith as the all-time winner of the "What Was He Thinking?" Award. Pressed for time, Captain Smith cancelled the customary lifeboat drill with passengers the day before the *Titanic* set sail. That same day, Smith dismissed an officer who took the key to the binocular case with him, thus depriving the *Titanic's* crow's nest lookouts of their binoculars to scan for icebergs. Smith went to bed after a banquet held in his honor the night of the disaster, even though the ship was heading into very dangerous waters, and was awakened by the ship's collision with the iceberg. The Captain failed to maintain a dedicated line for wireless communication with other ships because his communications officer was too busy sending the first-class passengers' cables back to the mainland detailing the adventures of their pleasure cruise. Virtually nothing is known of Captain Smith's final two hours on the *Titanic*.

Leadership Failure #2 – negligent oversight:

The year before the *Titanic* sailed, the same Captain Edward Smith was at the helm of the *Titanic's* sister ship, the *Olympic*, which collided with a British warship, the RMS *Hawke*, near the Isle of Wight. A Navy investigation laid the blame for the incident squarely on Captain Smith. Knowing of this catastrophic event in Smith's recent history, the *Titanic's* supervising authority, the White Star Fleet, nonetheless chose Smith to be captain of the *Titanic*. That esteemed committee deserves the "What Were *They* Thinking?" Award, which is given for *collective* insanity.

Leadership Failure #3 – hesitation in time of crisis:

First Officer in charge of the *Titanic*'s bridge, William McMaster Murdoch, delayed a full thirty seconds in ordering a change of course when he was informed that the ship was in imminent danger of ramming an iceberg – which happened exactly thirty-seven seconds after the iceberg was spotted. Murdoch gave the order with just seven seconds left to impact but by that time, changing the course of the mammoth vessel was impossible.

Another ocean-liner, the *Californian*, was within sight of the *Titanic* (just six nautical miles away) when the lookout crew spotted a four-stack passenger ship that had ceased its forward motion. The crew noticed that the mysterious ship sent up numerous distress rockets at intervals, and the crew notified the *Californian*'s captain, Stanley Lord, of the ship's unusual situation. Captain Lord chose to ignore the *Titanic*'s signals, passing them off as the exuberant *celebrations* of a pleasure cruise. He had shut down his own ship's engines for the night and was unwilling to start them up again. He, likewise, neglected to awaken his communications officer so that he could canvass the area for distress calls. The *Titanic* listed and then disappeared from the horizon after two hours of observation.

In sum, poor and negligent leadership can *literally* be deadly for those who are subjected to it.

But leadership is always a double-edged sword. Good leadership can be life-giving and life-saving. Though the leadership failures of the *Titanic* will go down in history as catastrophic, we must not overlook some astounding examples of heroic leadership in the same moment of disaster.

Leadership Success #1 – sacrificial endurance:

John "Jack" Phillips was the *Titanic*'s radio operator. As the ship began to sink, Captain Smith told Phillips that it was useless to keep sending out distress signals and that he should save himself and abandon ship. Phillips disregarded the order and kept sending out signals to any possible ship that could rescue them. His final message was cut short as the water entered the radio room. He risked his life to send those distress calls and barely escaped to a lifeboat, where he succumbed hours later to hypothermia before he could be rescued.

Of course, the heroism of the "band that played on" is well-known. What is not very well understood is that all eight members of the band chose to remain

on board playing music to calm and console the passengers as the *Titanic* sank, and all eight band members went down with the ship. Their final song was reputed to have been, "Nearer My God to Thee."

Leadership Success #2 – never compromise:

Second Officer Charles Lightoller was an experienced veteran of the sea, and he recognized immediately that the *Titanic* was in a desperate situation. His quick action freed several lifeboats that otherwise would have remained unused, which made it possible for dozens more passengers to be saved. But when one lifeboat was found to be full of men, Lightoller jumped into it and forced the men out of the boat *at gunpoint* so that women and children could be saved. He refused an order by the First Officer to board a lifeboat and was eventually sucked underwater by the sinking ship. Miraculously, the explosion of the ship's boiler as the ship went down forced Lightoller away from the sinking vessel, and he surfaced right next to one of the lifeboats he had freed. He helped keep the rickety boat afloat for the next four hours, and after seeing all the others onto the rescue boat, was the very last *Titanic* survivor to be rescued.

Leadership Success #3 – mission clarity:

Fr. Thomas Byles, a forty-two-year-old English Catholic priest who was heading to New York for his brother's wedding, twice refused urgent requests that he board a lifeboat because he wanted to be available for any soul who needed his spiritual help during those moments of desperation and death. As the ship sank, the priest stood on the deck praying the Rosary as Catholics, Protestants, and Jews all knelt around him praying.

Father Byle was not the only heroic clergyman on board. Scottish Evangelical Pastor John Harper was travelling with his six-year-old daughter to Chicago to preach at the church of the famed evangelist, Dwight Moody. When the *Titanic* hit the iceberg, Harper led his daughter to a lifeboat and could have gotten in because he was a widower with a small child. Instead, he kissed his daughter goodbye and ran around to every person who would listen, encouraging repentance and passionately telling others about salvation in Christ. He even gave his life jacket to a man who refused to accept the Gospel message at that late hour, commenting that the man would have another chance for salvation. Harper eventually succumbed to hypothermia in the frigid ocean with the name of Christ on his lips after presenting the message of hope to every passenger he could swim to.

Conclusion

Very few incidents in modern history show the value of leadership like the demise of the *Titanic*. The failure of leadership in so many key areas has led to a cultural image of the *Titanic* as the symbol of complete and total disaster. The preventable loss of 1,500 lives was an unmitigated tragedy, but it is not the only important truth we can derive from that sad day. The little-known stories of the unsung heroes whose principled leadership kept the disaster from reaching even greater proportions are the real leadership lessons of the *Titanic*.

Leadership is a double-edged sword: we bank on it when it is present and lament it when it is absent. Most of the time, however, we do not even think about it and presume that someone will always be there, carrying the heavy torch of responsibility into the dark night for the safety and wellbeing of people. The work of leadership is often high-profile, stress-filled, and impactful, but more often than not, it is the stuff of our regular lives. “Normal” people in all walks of life like you and me are the leaders who keep things going and perform many helpful services for our fellow humans. This is to say that leaders are like the plumber down the street whose shop you drive by every day without noticing it; he’s there, but he’s mostly invisible – until you have a leaky pipe.

In the following chapters, we will address five dimensions of leadership to familiarize ourselves with one of the most critical but often hidden elements of human culture that makes our world a better place in which to live: effective leadership.

The Leadership/Management Dance

There is a fundamental difference between the skills and mindsets of leaders versus managers, even though there are also many areas of overlap between the two. Leadership and management are a mesh of skills that cannot be separated; they can only be distinguished. Here’s my first quick attempt at the distinctions:

- Leadership is the sum total skill set needed to take an organization’s mission outward, to the world, where the mission causes life-transforming change.
- Management is the skill set needed to assure the mission’s inward support so that it endures into the future and functions efficiently.

A leader’s overall objectives are influence and impact; a manager’s goal is efficiency. Leadership skills are directed toward marshalling human resources for action like a field lieutenant calls the platoon together and leads them into battle. Management skills are directed toward maximizing the collective capabilities of an organization like the staff sergeant who prepares the troops and makes sure they’re equipped for warfare. I’ll have more to say on that military analogy below.

Probably the best summary statement that was ever made on the subject came from the undisputed authority on the management profession, Peter Drucker. He made this distinction in his famous book, *The Effective Executive*: “Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things.”¹ Because both of these functions are essentially arts rather than sciences, it is best to use a series of images to capture the nuances of the interplay between the two, *the dance*, if you will:

Leadership...	Management...
...focuses on who, what, and why	...concentrates on how
...sees the forest	...focuses on the trees
...gazes out over the horizon	...looks down for the icebergs
...sees the world awash in color	...views things in black and white
...tends to be lavish when needed	...is inclined to be stingy or economical
...spends	...cuts
...delights in what can be done	...calculates what can’t be done
...admits no upper limit	...always finds the bottom line
...is creative	...is constructive

¹ Peter F. Drucker, *The Effective Executive*, New York: Harper and Row, 1967.

...hears music	...hears complaints
...sees opportunities	...fixes problems
...builds coalitions	...crunches numbers
...dances in the rain along Madison Avenue like a smiling Gene Kelly.	...maneuvers carefully like a stock trader on Wall Street.

The complementarity, or overlap, between the two skill sets is usually found in each individual manager or leader. One skill set usually predominates in every individual, which can be related to his temperament and personality, but I have found that it is extremely rare for a person to be very proficient in *both* skill sets. The skills flow out of different worldviews and take time to develop into a person's individual leadership or management character. They are oriented to complementary, but different, objectives, and very few people have the capacity, or time, to pursue both.

Still, effective performers in their respective fields strive to develop both sets of skills to some degree, while recognizing that one set will always be dominant and related to their personal mindset, while the other set will be necessary for their coordination with others in work life and common projects. Leaders need management skills and managers need leadership skills to be fully professional in their approach to their missions.

A friend of mine once told me the story of a Marine Corps Staff Sergeant who was leading a group of newly-minted second lieutenants on a cleanup drill in their encampment during their first days at The Basic School (Marine officer training). The position of sergeant is the quintessential management position in any military organization, but this particular sergeant's *leadership* skills were forever burned into my friend's mind because, on that day, the lower-ranking Marine turned a routine duty of trash cleanup with his officer-trainees into a war exercise.

Technically, the Sergeant could not give orders to the officers, but he could *lead* them; so he divided the larger group into several smaller fire teams, assigned each team its objective for conquering a hill of garbage (in case you haven't noticed, Marines like to take hills), and established communication lines to give him updates on the progress of their war on trash. Not only were the young Marine officers motivated by a war game and cleaned up the field in record time, but they learned a valuable leadership lesson in that manufactured

theatre of battle. The best warriors have both leadership and management skills that they put to good use in fulfilling their objectives, whatever those objectives may be. The Staff Sergeant would always be a manager in the military system, but he also knew how to lead men.

On the other hand, leaders must be intimately aware of the issues and concerns of managers and need to have some savvy in that area in order to partner with their managers in seeking solutions to complex problems. After the first successful launch of his Falcon 9 rocket in September of 2013, Elon Musk, the mercurial leader of Tesla and SpaceX, gave an interview in which he described in minute detail the workings of his rocket and why it had been successful. He had overseen just about every detail of the rocket's production process because so much of his company's fortunes depended on a successful launch. Some have accused Musk of being a micromanager – and he may be – but he is essentially a leader who has a load of technical skill to back up his endeavors. In the face of that criticism, I am reminded of what my old basketball coach used to say: "Son, we don't argue with success."

A leader needs real management ability because the ultimate leadership skill is the management of human resources, i.e., people. A good manager, likewise, has to have real leadership skills in order to motivate people to do the work and channel their skills into an efficient operation, à la the Marine Staff Sergeant. Yet, the respective skill sets remain distinct and dominant for leaders and managers, and the *individual* must blend them for effective performance.

The success of *organizations* too lies in finding that delicate balance between leadership and management within its walls. In the work of a team, this balance can be likened to two people riding a tandem bike. The leader takes the front position with the moveable handle bars to steer the bike while the manager sits in back with the fixed handle bars and provides pedal power. When they first hop on the bike, there is a period of awkwardness and instability that requires their mutual coordination and effort to stay upright, but when they reach a certain equilibrium where their coordinated efforts hurl them forward in synch, the riding smooths out and the miles seem to pass without a hitch. Two minds thinking about the task and two bodies pedaling together make for a stronger effort. If you think about it, it is kind of like a dance.

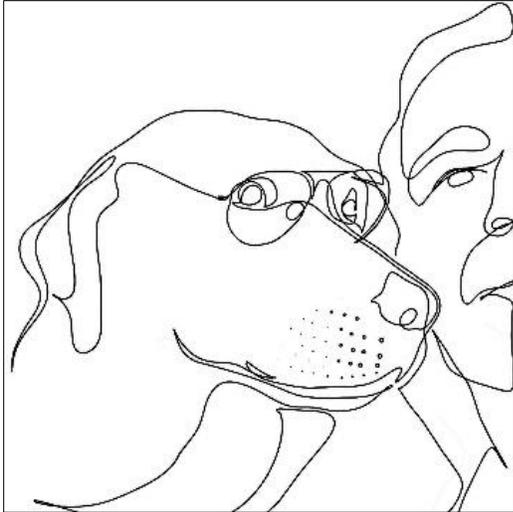
Any complex organism lives and thrives through the coordination of its many parts, and no single part can carry out all the necessary functions. The

leader's greatest challenge is to assemble all the parts of an organization for a common purpose to achieve goals outside itself, while the manager's challenge is to bring all the working parts together into an efficient instrument for channeling energy and resources to accomplish those objectives. It is sometimes true that in smaller organizations the leaders also have to be the managers and vice versa, but in all cases, large or small, the leadership and management skills are distinct even if they are not separate.

This manual is primarily about the things that make leaders effective in the non-profit sector. It is a world that requires the best leaders because its objectives are so vital for the wellbeing of people. Peter Drucker clarifies that non-profits "do something very different from either business or government. Business supplies, either goods or services. Government controls.... The 'non-profit' institution neither supplies goods or services nor controls. Its 'product' is neither a pair of shoes nor an effective regulation. Its product is a changed human being."² Those of us who have been in the non-profit business for years know how satisfying it can be to be part of a world-changing mission, and we thank God that we are called into the tangible service of people with all their human and spiritual needs. Perhaps for that reason alone I've put this book together because I believe non-profit leadership is one of the most important institutions of our time.

About the Author

² Peter Drucker, *Managing the Non-Profit Organization: Principles and Practices* (New York: HarperBusiness, 1992), xiv.



Peter Darcy is a writer, editor, and web designer who spent thirty years in the non-profit sector and Catholic missionary work. His great passion is educating others about the power of Beauty, Truth, and Goodness. In 2020 he launched the Sacred Windows initiative for this purpose. He is a columnist at Catholic365.com.

Darcy has authored or ghostwritten fourteen books dedicated to spiritual and leadership themes, including:

- * Praying with Fire: Learning to Pray the Catholic Way (2025)
- * No Knot Too Tight: Short Reflections on Mary, Undoer of Knots (2024)
- * Natures of Fire: God's Magnificent Angels (2021)
- * No Nonsense Non-Profit: Leadership Principles for Church and Charity (2020), and
- * The Seven Leadership Virtues of Joan of Arc (2020).

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