

JOSEPH S. NYE

THE
POWERS
TO

LEAD

The Powers to Lead

This page intentionally left blank

The Powers to Lead

Joseph S. Nye Jr.

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

2008

OXFORD

UNIVERSITY PRESS

Oxford University Press, Inc., publishes works that further
Oxford University's objective of excellence
in research, scholarship, and education.

Oxford New York
Auckland Cape Town Dar es Salaam Hong Kong Karachi
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Nairobi
New Delhi Shanghai Taipei Toronto

With offices in
Argentina Austria Brazil Chile Czech Republic France Greece
Guatemala Hungary Italy Japan Poland Portugal Singapore
South Korea Switzerland Thailand Turkey Ukraine Vietnam

Copyright © 2008 by Joseph S. Nye Jr.

Published by Oxford University Press, Inc.
198 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016

www.oup.com

Oxford is a registered trademark of Oxford University Press

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise,
without the prior permission of Oxford University Press.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Nye, Joseph S.

The powers to lead / Joseph S. Nye.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-19-533562-0

1. Political leadership. 2. Leadership. 3. Executive ability.

4. Interpersonal communication. I. Title.

JC330.3.N94 2008

352.23'6—dc22 2007039163

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper

*For the Kennedy School students
and colleagues
who have taught me.*

*And, as always, for Molly,
who leads with soft power.*

This page intentionally left blank



Contents

Preface	ix
1 Leadership	i
2 Leadership and Power	27
3 Types and Skills	53
4 Contextual Intelligence	85
5 Good and Bad Leaders	109
Appendix	
Leadership: A Dozen Quick Take-Aways	147
Notes	149
Bibliography	183
Index	207

This page intentionally left blank

Preface

A leader is best when people barely know he exists, not so good when people obey and acclaim him; worst when they despise him.

Lao Tzu, 630 B.C.¹

One ought to be both feared and loved, but as it is difficult for the two to go together, it is much safer to be feared than loved. . . . Still a prince should make himself feared in such a way that if he does not gain love, he at any rate avoids hatred.

Machiavelli, 1513²

Two-thirds of Americans say their country is in a “leadership crisis.” They distrust their leaders—whether politician, board-room chief, university head, or media watchdog. In each of eleven different fields, no more than 40 percent said they had a great deal of confidence in their leaders.³ Americans have long been ambivalent about leaders, and the problem is not limited to the United States. Polls show similar results in many countries.⁴ Those facts might tempt some to shrug off the problem as nothing new, but in reality, the context of leadership is changing, and many of today’s leaders have not caught up with it.

Both power and leadership are changing in today’s world. Knowledge is power, and more people have more information

than at any prior time in human history. A former CEO of a multinational medical instruments company argues that “the time is ripe to redefine leadership for the 21st century. The military-manufacturing model of leadership that worked so well 50 years ago doesn’t get the best out of people today.”⁵ A few decades ago, some theorists contrasted a power approach with a leadership approach.⁶ But if one thinks of power as including both the hard power of coercion and the soft power of attraction, leadership and power are inextricably intertwined. President George W. Bush has said, “I’m the decider, and I decide what’s best,” but there is much more to leadership than that.⁷

Leadership involves power, but not all power relationships are instances of leadership. Bombing an enemy into submission is quite different from attracting others to follow. However, some contemporary theories that define leadership as synonymous with the soft power of attraction miss another part of reality. In practice, effective leadership requires a mixture of soft and hard power skills that I call *smart power*. The proportions differ with contexts. A business executive has more access to the hard power of hiring and firing; a university president or a democratic politician has to rely more on the soft power of attraction and persuasion. I introduced the concept of soft power into the discourse of international politics two decades ago. Now I find others using these terms in discussions of leadership, but not always in the most appropriate way.

This book explores the relationship of hard and soft power to leadership. There are many ways to define leadership. One recent count collected 221 definitions from the 1920s to the 1990s, with the earlier ones stressing the ability of a leader to impress his or her will and later ones seeing more mutuality in the relationship between leaders and followers.⁸ I define leaders as those who help a group create and achieve shared goals. Some try to impose their

own goals, others derive them more from the group, but leaders mobilize people to reach those objectives. Leadership is a social relationship with three key components—leaders, followers, and the contexts in which they interact—and I will examine each.

A significant strand of current leadership theory is described as the “neocharismatic and transformational approach.” Charisma or personal magnetism is an important dimension of the soft power of attraction, but charisma is hard to pin down. The press has described many a political leader or CEO as “charismatic” when things are going well, only to withdraw the label after he or she fails. Transformation is also a difficult term to pin down. President Bush thinks of himself as a transformational leader, and Condoleezza Rice, his secretary of state, has spoken of the administration’s “transformational diplomacy.” These terms, developed by leadership theorists and used by some leaders, can be confusing because they refer both to leaders’ objectives and to the styles they use. In fact, much of current leadership theory is in need of more careful specification.

I found this out the hard way. After five years working at the assistant secretary level in the State Department, the Pentagon, and the Intelligence community and another eight years as a university dean, I thought I had some experience with leadership. After I stepped down as dean in 2004, I agreed to teach a core curriculum course on leadership at the Kennedy School of Government. As I began seriously to read the leadership literature, I could not find a good short analytical introduction about power and leadership for the students I was teaching or for the general reader. There were short introductory books, but they were not analytical. I wanted something based on the scientific and historical record but written in an accessible style.

There is a considerable literature on leadership written by psychologists and experts on organizational behavior, but much of it

is not written for a general audience. There is also a large leadership coaching industry that has produced a vast number of books, tapes, and programs that take a how-to and self-help approach, but much of it is analytically weak. In 1990, after surveying hundreds of definitions of leadership, one expert concluded that leadership is a very “hot” word, but it “has come to mean all things to all people.”⁹ One study counted over six thousand such books on the subject, though the authors commented that they felt they were “reviewing the same book 50 times with different titles.”¹⁰ Little of this literature adequately addresses the questions of power and leadership in a context broader than that of modern organizations. I hope to clarify this discussion by applying the concepts of hard and soft power to leadership as I see it. This is the gap I propose to fill with this book: What can I tell people about power and leadership in a short analytical primer so that they can select, evaluate, and judge their leaders? Nothing is more important than citizens having the tools to assess and judge their leaders, whether past or present, public or private. Leadership is an art, not a science, but even art benefits from criticism.

Chapter 1 discusses the ubiquity of leadership in human groups and organizations over time and addresses the causal importance of leaders in history. I distinguish leadership with and without authority, shared leadership, and the role of nature and nurture in forming leaders. Chapter 2 develops my distinction between hard and soft power and applies it to leaders and to followers. I also discuss how power resources change over time and context. Chapter 3 focuses on the types and skills of leaders. I criticize and reformulate the concepts of charismatic and noncharismatic leaders and transformational and transactional leaders and examine the key skills for leadership in modern democratic societies, including the inspirational skills of vision, communication, and

emotional IQ, as well as political and organizational skills related to transactions. Chapter 4 outlines the contextual intelligence essential for smart power. I discuss culture, the distribution of power, followers' needs and demands, crisis situations, and information flows. Good contextual intelligence broadens the bandwidth of leaders so that they can develop and adapt strategies for different situations. Finally, chapter 5 addresses good and bad leadership from the point of view of both effectiveness and ethics and why leaders are often held to a different standard. Understanding how better to judge good and bad leaders will be crucial for our democratic future.

Many people have helped me with this short book. I have benefited from observation, discussion, and interviews with a number of American and foreign leaders, some of whom are cited in the notes. I have learned a great deal from my colleagues and students at the Kennedy School. I am particularly grateful for the support of the school's Center for Public Leadership. For helpful comments, I wish to thank Graham Allison, James Blight, Hannah Bowles, Jack Donahue, David Gergen, Richard Hackman, Ron Heifetz, Ben Heineman, Elaine Kamarck, Barbara Kellerman, Nan Keohane, Robert Keohane, Rakesh Khurana, Matthew Kohut, Rod Kramer, Dutch Leonard, Ted Marmor, Mark Moore, Ben Nye, Dan Nye, Molly Nye, Todd Pittinsky, Robert Rotberg, David Welch, Kenneth Winston, Andrew Zelleke, and Peter Zimmerman. I had wonderful research assistance from Henry Walters and Mark Fliegauf, and overall support from Jeanne Marasca. I stand on the shoulders of others and am blessed by their friendship.