Love Leadership
by John Hope Bryant

The New Way to Lead in a Fear-Based World

QUICK OVERVIEW
In his book Love Leadership, successful and internationally recognized social entrepreneur John Hope Bryant examines the secret to his own success and the success of other entrepreneurs and businesspeople. Drawing on his personal experience in developing the nonprofit Operation HOPE, as well as the experiences of successful people such as President Bill Clinton and Microsoft Founder Bill Gates, Bryant tells an engaging story of how love makes money.

Bryant claims that much of the current economic crisis is the result of leading through fear and a failure to run businesses with compassion. He points to the subprime mortgage lending crisis as a main example, where businesspeople acted based on the get-rich-quick scenario of the short term instead of focusing on the tougher, but ultimately more profitable, road of leading (and, in some cases, lending) with compassion.

In Love Leadership, Bryant makes a strong case for overhauling the world’s economy by leading with vision and love. He maintains that the more leaders give, the more they get in return, both in financial gains and the rewards of pursuing life with purpose.

APPLY AND ACHIEVE
Love Leadership makes the case, as unlikely as it sounds, that the best way to get ahead is to figure out what you have to give to a world seemingly obsessed with only one question: What do I get?

Love Leadership suggests that the best way to do well and to achieve true wealth over the long term is to do good. The book takes a new approach to leadership, one that allows you to strive as hard as the next person and achieve as much as you are humanly capable of. But it is a uniquely humane brand of leadership that lets you sleep well at night, too, one that reminds you that your life has purpose and meaning, and that even as you receive, you have something valuable to offer this world.

Whether you’re a small-business owner or the CEO of a large company, Bryant’s book will inspire you with the power (and return) of doing good works, and give you clear lessons in how to succeed for the long haul. Bryant makes a strong case that businesses that ultimately fail, even if they’re initially wildly successful, come to their ruin by their lack of attention to compassion. If you want long-term success, you have to be...
passionate about what you do, care deeply for your employees and colleagues, and operate with an attitude of service toward your customers. And you have to be real. Love leadership is authentic leadership.

Loss is personal for me. I learned the importance of the first law of love leadership—loss creates leaders—when I was a child and my family struggled with money problems.

Within a short period of time, my mom and dad accumulated their own home, an eight-unit apartment building that we rented out, a nursery my mother ran, a gas station in South Central L.A., and a construction company my dad ran. There was only one problem: My dad was financially illiterate, and too proud to admit it. He would make a dollar and spend a dollar and 50 cents. I got my work ethic from my dad, but I learned financial literacy from my mother. She worked for many years and retired from McDonnell Douglas, now Boeing. In addition to working at her job, she often sold things to her co-workers, from candy to a range of handicraft and food products that she would sew and cook herself. This augmented her income and provided her a measure of independence as well.

My mother understood that life wasn’t about making more money; it was about making better decisions with the money you made. When she said she was going to purchase a car, she meant in cash. The entrepreneur in her would often tell me growing up, “The man will set your salary, but you decide your income.”

The interesting thing is that once you understand what loss really is, once you lose someone dear to you, or once you lose yourself, you gain the world.

Once you learn that the world didn’t come to an end and that you could work your way back to being whole again, you gain enormous confidence and wisdom about how to live: how to have humility, what matters and what doesn’t, how to succeed against all odds.

There can be no strength, no real inner growth, without the pain of legitimate suffering.

Loss creates leaders with a competitive advantage earned in the school of hard knocks. The advantage comes from the tremendous personal and professional growth loss generates.

Loss strips away your physical crutches, and even your emotional crutches, and leaves you with nothing but the spirit. And in the spirit lies your true power. Loss fires your spirit, and it steels your mettle. You have experienced your own personal pain: the loss of a job, a personal betrayal, a major disappointment. And out of that pain, you gain not only strength and a competitive advantage, but also something even more essential: learning. Learning is the source of your advantage.

Operation HOPE was a way for me to do well and do good, as well. Ultimately, this work has saved me—from myself. If it hadn’t been for the work of Operation HOPE over all these years, I’m sure I would have been obnoxious, self-absorbed and very wealthy, but lonely. Giving other people dignity gave me dignity. Loss has saved me.

And it is saving others. We have served over a million people to date. We’re changing the face of poverty. And all because I experienced loss. Loss really does create leaders. It puts you on the path toward love leadership—leadership based on the strength born of struggle.

FEAR FAILS

What I’ve learned time and time again is that fear doesn’t work. In the long term, letting fear motivate your actions—how you treat others, how you conduct business, how you live your life—leads to failure.

A lot of powerful people in this world, oddly enough, have a poor image of themselves. Outwardly, low self-esteem manifests itself in arrogance, in a sort of brutality in the way leaders manage. Business for them is a zero-sum, winner-takes-all competition.

Self-esteem is critical to combating fear.

You’ve got to feel good about yourself before you can feel good about anything else. You’ll fall in life if you don’t have self-confidence. You’ll fail even more spectacularly if you lack what leadership expert Bill George calls a “True North”—if you don’t have a purpose in your life, if you don’t believe in something larger and more important than yourself.

Look around you in the corridors of business today, from the biggest corporation to the tiniest mom-and-pop operation, and you’ll see a picture of fear just as vivid as some of the streets in the inner city where I grew up. Everywhere around us, we see seemingly successful leaders who practice what I call fear-based leadership.

Fear-based leadership tactics include the following:

• Using aggressive language, tone and eye contact
Love Leadership

• Criticizing unfairly
• Blaming, without offering reasonable recourse
• Applying rules inconsistently
• Stealing credit
• Making unreasonable demands
• Excluding others from opportunities
• Personalizing problems
• Breaching confidentiality

The problem is that the entire business world seems to have come down with a case of attention deficit disorder. The disease goes by another name: short-termism. Short-termism is similar to fear and laziness, in that it relies on shortcuts to achieve results.

One of the most significant examples of the failure of fear-based leadership motivated by the desire for a short-term fix or shortcut is the subprime mortgage crisis that has gripped the capital markets the world over. Huge losses on foreclosed homes have morphed into a full-blown credit crisis, a liquidity crisis, and ultimately a crisis of confidence that, at the time this book was going to press, rivaled the Great Depression in its severity.

The root of the crisis lay in a toxic combination of fear, greed and laziness. And it emerged from the bedrock of American wealth: housing. Everyone in the mortgage industry was trying to get rich quick while the sun shined. No one cared what happened if homeowners couldn’t repay their mortgages. Everyone was busy cutting the biggest slice of the pie—for themselves.

The Five Laws of Love Leadership:

• Loss Creates Leaders (There can be no strength without legitimate suffering.)
• Fear Fails (Only respect and love lead to success.)
• Love Makes Money (Love is at the core of true wealth.)
• Vulnerability Is Power (When you open up to people, they open up to you.)
• Giving Is Getting (The more you offer to others, the more they will give back to you.)

LOVE MAKES MONEY

I recognized that I didn’t want to make money just any old way.

It had to be honorable. I began to understand, through my own mistakes, that there was a difference between good capitalism and bad capitalism. I wanted to do well for myself, make no mistake about it, but I also wanted to find a way to serve society, not just serve myself and get paid. As I would eventually learn, doing well by doing good is the essence of the third law of love leadership: Love makes money.

There are only two things in this world: love and fear. What you don’t love, you fear. In my teens, I was running my early businesses out of fear. As we’ve seen, fear is me-focused. It is short-term. It is based in greed.

The alternative is love-based prosperity. The third law of love leadership—love makes money—breaks down into a set of interlocking and related goals: creating long-term relationships built on caring for others and in service of a larger good.

Each goal is guided by love. When you operate this way, the by-product can’t help but be prosperity for everyone, which naturally leads to money for you, too.

That’s because love always leads to money. Money is nothing more than one of the many by-products of love leadership. That’s right: Money, over the long term, is simply another confirmation that you’re doing good work. It’s a by-product. It’s never the product. No entrepreneur worth his salt—and I think of game-changers like Bill Gates, Ted Turner, Richard Branson and many others—ever started a business just because he or she wanted to make billions of dollars. These people probably didn’t mind the idea of making a lot of money, but they started in business because they were obsessed with an idea. They were idealists, in the broadest sense of the word.

The third law of love leadership—love makes money—means thinking about others more than you think about yourself. It means caring for others: what they think, what they need, what they want. It means not just putting customers first, but also thinking from the customer’s point of view—what they think, what they need, what they want. Caring for others means giving a damn about people as people, not as transactions or as means to an end—and not just because it’s the right thing to do, but also because it’s in your own self-interest.

If you want to grow your business wildly over the next few months and meet your profit projections over the next few
quarters, there is no more effective way than the fear-based model of leadership we saw in the last chapter. Nothing works better in the short term than intimidating the hell out of people and coercing them to do exactly what you want. They’ll jump to attention every time you come into the room and agree with everything you say.

If you lead with love for the long term, people will follow you forever, wherever—for their own good as well as yours—and you will be remembered as a person of greatness.

I learned through trial and error that if I treated my business partners and clients as transactions and not as relationships, I would get that one sale, but not 20. There would be no customer next year, and my business wouldn’t be sustainable. If, in contrast, I treated others the way I wanted to be treated, I learned that they actually wanted to do business with me more, they trusted me more, they were more loyal to me and they had more confidence in me.

My favorite thing to say to people I care about and respect is “What can I do to help you?” This really floors people. When was the last time someone asked you what he or she could do for you, and meant it?

Want to hear something crazy? A big part of my job at the nonprofit I run is fundraising, but I never ask anyone for money for Operation HOPE or any of my initiatives. Of course, at the appropriate time, I may send a proposal outlining a pressing need, or mail something to document the substance of what we do, but I never ask. I have raised $500 million this way, by not asking and not selling. I have found it much more powerful to share, but this, of course, means that you actually have to believe in what you are sharing and doing. You cannot fake authenticity.

I am all for free enterprise and capitalism. Without a clearly defined profit motivation, a business simply will not be viable for long.

Everyone needs to have an enlightened self-interest in the outcome of a business transaction, and it should start with a genuine understanding of and concern with what’s best for the client, the customer, the borrower. That concern—what I call love—was fundamentally absent during the events that led up to this economic crisis.

Your reputation depends on something greater than making money. It depends on creating prosperity for all.

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**VULNERABILITY IS POWER**

How I communicate with my board of directors is a lesson in the fourth law of love leadership, vulnerability is power. I tend to over-communicate, even at the risk of irritating some people. I would rather tell my board members what they don’t need to hear than risk not telling them something they thought I should have. I would rather over-communicate, under-commit, and over-perform than under-communicate, over-commit, and underperform.

The love-leadership approach to managing problems and bad news is different, and it pays dividends. It brings people along with you and helps them buy in. It operates from vulnerability and transparency rather than pride and secrecy. Often, this vulnerability gives others the comfort and confidence to stay with you when things get really rough.

The fourth law of love leadership—vulnerability is power—says that admitting weaknesses and owning up to mistakes have counterintuitive benefits. When you are honest, people are more likely to forgive any weaknesses and mistakes. When you open up, people open up to you. Vulnerability is the door to your heart, and being vulnerable grants important benefits to those who are strong enough to leave that door open. Vulnerability shows that you are human, and it makes you loved—and all great leaders are, at their core, deeply human and much loved. That’s why people follow them. It’s the source of their power. Rather than ceding control to others, being vulnerable actually puts you in the driver’s seat. You’re not waiting around for anyone else to open up, to get in touch, to care. You see what’s needed and you do it, out of care for others.

When you love, you’re taking charge of the situation, even if it makes you vulnerable.

Delivering bad news and admitting mistakes as soon as you become aware of them is one of the most powerful ways to show vulnerability. Love is work, and doing the work means dealing with bad news before it deals with you. Why wait for someone to whom you owe money to call you? You knew Tuesday you didn’t have it. Surprise him, and give him a ring first, saying, “Joe, I don’t have the $100 I owe you, and I won’t have it until next month, but I do have $20 today, and I want to send it to you today.”

Calling him first is the entire ballgame, because if he has to track you down, he has also already assumed you are a bum with no intention of making good on your commitments.
GIVING IS GETTING

By late 2008 Operation HOPE was facing a major revenue crunch as a direct result of the global economic crisis. The organization had to tighten its financial belt, I needed to push and inspire our team to do more with less, and that started with me setting the example: I worked longer hours than ever before. The result translated into more stress on me and my senior management team. I was the one charged with raising 100 percent of the additional funding we needed to survive. My senior management team was dealing with greater levels of organizational stress, because they had to grapple with the real effects of tightening financial resources on the ground and with their people.

Let me say it plain: It would have been easy to have simply cited the recession’s impact on our finances, and thereafter rapidly moved to cut a significant percentage of our staff, services and program offices. I know many leaders who would not have thought twice about axing employees to boost the bottom line. But that did not make sense to me, or make it right.

This approach, more often than not, ends up winning battles and losing wars. To me, people on our staff are not numbers on a page. They are friends and dedicated employees. They are mothers and fathers, proud providers for their families and human beings. Our paycheck pays the mortgage, the car note, the insurance and the grocery bill. Although they are fairly compensated to be sure, most of them still live from paycheck to paycheck, just as approximately 70 percent of all Americans do. They love helping others, and most would do the work for free if they could afford to, but, as a practical matter, they also need this job to provide dignity, shelter, education and hope for themselves and their families.

The message of this story is the premise behind the fifth law of love leadership: Giving is getting. The more you give, the more you get.

The fifth law of love leadership translates into a long-term commitment to serving others, starting with serving those who work in your organization and expanding out to serving your partners, vendors and customers, and the world. It fundamentally requires that you serve without expecting anything in return—because it is the right thing to do.

So what is the “special sauce” that makes people stick around? The answer is this: a powerful combination of passion, authenticity, purpose and servant leadership.

In the early years of my career, I would often confuse a desire to get a job done with the real capacity for someone else to actually do the job. In other words, back then, if people were not getting something accomplished, oftentimes it was either because I unreasonably expected them to be superhuman or because I was not giving them the time or the tools to achieve the task at hand.

Giving starts by giving to your people; and giving must be done without expectations and instead with a purpose of doing good for others. Employees want to know that their employer takes an interest in them for the long term and wants them to succeed.

There’s another critical way you get people to give their best: You help them find and follow their passion.

A good business plan is the opposite of taking. Good capitalism, as I call it, means to have an open hand, not a closed fist. It involves building a group of people who believe in you and your vision, who trust you, whom you don’t have to buy off or coerce.

Let’s make this plain: Giving is also in your own enlightened self-interest. I call the concept good selfishness. When you want to help others, they want to help you. When you want to do good, the universe wants you to do well.

Relationship Building

Beats Networking

Long-term relationships based on genuine caring are the financial engine that drives love leadership. At the end of the day, we don’t do business with governments or companies or organizations, but with people.

Real relationships also take a real investment. If you treat your customer like an object in a transaction, is that work? Probably not. If you take the time and nurture a relationship, is that work? It’s a hell of a lot of work. But there’s also a huge payoff. You won’t get paid one time; you’ll get paid several times as that person gives you multiple levels of business.

The problem is, relationship building is often misunderstood as networking. Traditional networking “techniques” and the building of real relationships are radically different activities, however. Networking is a one-way relationship; building relationships is two-way. Most people walk in with their hand out. They think the meeting is all about the “ask” or the “sale.” In contrast, I look at a meeting as a wonderful opportunity to gain a new friend, colleague or partner in the world. And that is the differentiating factor between building solid relationships and networking. Networking is about me, not we.
CONCLUSION: GOOD CAPITALISM AND LOVE LEADERSHIP

When we look closely at how we got here, it’s easy to point a finger at our economic system. I still believe that capitalism works. In fact, I would go further and say that nothing has done more to lift the world’s poor out of poverty than market-based economics. But the current economic model is broken, and what has been done to the system has given business a bad name.

Of late, there has been increasing criticism of our basic economic model. But what has been going on is not so much capitalism as bad capitalism. Bad capitalism is a result of an obsessive focus on a fairly narrow band of short-term financial results. The aim is to make money, to the exclusion of all other considerations.

Why should we care about how someone less fortunate does? The short answer is that caring for the success and prosperity of others, particularly those at the bottom rungs of the success ladder, is the only way, over the long term, that those who are well-off are ever going to be able to keep the precious wealth that they have been able to accumulate.

Gated communities will not save anyone. The only thing that can save us all is hope made real in people’s lives. The most dangerous person alive is a person without hope.

Prosperity is the partner of peace. But without hope, when people don’t believe in the future and don’t value their own life or others, there is simply not enough law enforcement available in the world to maintain order.

As we move to restructure our global economy, we need to make sure that the conversation is based on a love-leadership model, has a long-range vision, and empowers people to participate and to become legitimate stakeholders in the system.

Recommended Reading

If you enjoyed this summary of Love Leadership, check out:

Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power & Greatness by Robert K. Greenleaf


How Remarkable Women Lead: The Breakthrough Model for Work & Life by Joanna Barsh, Geoffrey Lewis and Susie Cranston

About the Author

John Hope Bryant is the founder, chairman and CEO of Operation HOPE, the first nonprofit social-investment banking operation in the United States. Operation HOPE has raised more than $500 million to empower poor communities since its founding in 1992. Vice chair of the U.S. President’s Advisory Council on Financial Literacy and chairman of the Under-Served Committee for the U.S. President’s Council, Bryant is an internationally renowned motivational speaker. He is also a Young Global Leader for the World Economic Forum. A guest on Oprah, Bryant has also appeared in feature articles in the New York Times, Wall Street Journal and Los Angeles Times. Bryant has received more than 400 awards and recognitions for his life’s work of empowering low-wealth communities, including Oprah Winfrey’s coveted Use Your Life Award. Bryant is a native of Los Angeles, where he lives with his wife.