

# BOOK REVIEW

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Stewart D. Friedman (2008). *Total Leadership: Be a Better Leader, Have a Richer Life*. Boston: Harvard Business Press. 248 pages.

**T**otal Leadership is a book long matured that stems from the author's experience crafting a leadership development program at a Fortune 500 company and his subsequent MBA teaching at the Wharton School. This book views leadership through the work-life lens. Its premise: To be an efficient and inspiring leader, you need to clarify your values and priorities, consider all domains of your life (home, work, self, and community), and act with authenticity—that is, as a whole person as opposed to a leader at work isolated from life's other domains.

Friedman argues that respecting yourself as a whole person makes you a better leader at work because you reduce conflict among varying commitments and you envision your life as more consistent and harmonious. Yet, he notes, "it takes leadership skills to manage the boundaries between the different areas of your life" (p. 68). Identifying potential synergies among your home, work, self, and community domains requires a willingness to experiment with possible changes in your life. It is an ongoing project that requires leadership.

Readers will get the most from this book with paper and pencil handy, for it proposes a set of exercises, starting with the classic leadership exercise of defining a leadership vision and core values (chapter 2), and following with simple yet powerful work-

life assessments (chapter 3). In my undergraduate leadership course at the Carroll School of Management at Boston College, I have assigned the exercises in chapter 3. The vast majority of the students' essays expressed how surprised and enlightened they were by the new representation of their life that came to light when doing these exercises. The "four-way attention chart" helps readers summarize how important each of the four domains of life is to them and how they distribute their time and energy. The "four circles" exercise requires readers to draw a mental map of the four domains of life, with the circles' sizes representing the domains' importance. This reveals how some of the domains intersect (pointing to synergy or enrichment between them) while others are disconnected and, hence, compete for time and energy (conflict). Another exercise invites readers to rate their satisfaction in each domain and in life as a whole. These three exercises are the starting point for a gap analysis and call for action: Identify the stakeholders in each domain and assess how well you meet their expectations (chapter 4), talk to them to clarify mutual expectations and find "four-way wins" (chapter 5), and design experiments that stakeholders will also support (chapters 6 and 7).

Highly innovative, pedagogical, and inspiring, the book combines the largely masculine field of leadership studies with

the largely feminine field of work-life, rejuvenating both. A key outcome of this fruitful combination is the stakeholders' approach that applies the principle of 360° feedback, which commonly is used by leaders to assess and improve performance, to a work-life gap analysis. At a time when work-life scholars are actively investigating relational perspectives, the stakeholders' approach moves away from an individualistic assessment to encompass a broader relational reality: Stakeholders are not only the persons who most matter to you but also the ones to whom you have a responsibility. Friedman's innovations bridge the leadership and work-life fields, while mastering them both.

One of Friedman's key assumptions is that leadership is universal and can be learned (Kouzes & Posner, 2007), preferably with the help of a "coaching network." Friedman's work obviously is grounded in the enrichment paradigm (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), as opposed to the conflict paradigm (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Instead of taking the traditional work-life *balance* approach that implies a zero-sum game between these two domains (Friedman, Christensen & DeGroot, 1998), *Total Leadership* taps the jazz metaphor, which emphasizes "playing richly textured music with the sounds of life's various instruments" rather than "muting the trumpet so the saxophone can be heard" (p. 15). Drawing on decades of work-life research to emphasize that harmonizing the domains of one's life is not only about time, but also about psychological interference and boundaries management (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Kossek, Lautsch, & Eaton, 2006), Friedman acknowledges individual differences in the way each of us experiments with the different domains of life and invites readers to define the scope of each of them. As a matter of fact, my students gave different definitions. For instance, some included networking and applying for jobs in their work domain with their student role. Some included this in their self-domain, restricting the work domain to current studying and work activities.

From a pedagogical perspective, *Total Leadership* benefits from the author's ex-

perience teaching MBA participants and corporate executives. Its three-part structure is very simple—be real, be whole, be innovative—and it includes templates and real-life examples for each exercise. Offering a concise and crystal-clear history of the fields it builds upon (pp. 15–19), the book explains complex work-life concepts, such as flexible and permeable boundaries (p. 85), in a simple manner—"ce que l'on conçoit bien s'énonce clairement" (Boileau, 1928). Acknowledging the fear and resistance that any change process can engender, Friedman gives useful tips to help readers prepare for discussion and negotiation with important stakeholders. Do you have a "dreaded stakeholder," one whose expectations you think you do not meet? Why not try to rehearse your conversation with a role play and reverse the roles so that you understand his or her expectations better? Have you identified gaps in the way your life is presently structured but fallen short on ideas for change? Friedman presents nine types of experiments that you can combine. Beyond the book, Friedman has built a Web site ([www.totalleadership.org](http://www.totalleadership.org)) and a blog so that the growing community of total leaders can coach one another and share experiments and success stories.

Suggesting a bold vision of leadership that encompasses all domains of life, *Total Leadership* urges readers to change their behaviors and attitudes regarding the way their domains of life intersect and interact. Its tone is typical of American positive thinking, which emphasizes individual freedom over fate and encourages the challenging of social expectations. In that sense, it is highly energizing and liberating. The book's scholarly ambition also is inspiring. Although leadership and work-life are the most salient fields of studies the books draws upon, Friedman also draws on human capital, organizational change, and negotiation research. By doing so, he provides an effective framework and approach to improve participants' productivity and satisfaction through gradual and focused experiments.

As a work-life scholar, I would like to see the research presented in *Total Leadership* evolve in two directions. The first would be

to go one step further into the complexity of our lives, so as to examine conflicts and synergies *within* each of the four domains used by the author as a means to structure the analysis. For instance, within the work domain, one can experience conflicts between being a student and being an employee or between being an employee and looking for a job in another company. Could this additional layer of analysis enrich Friedman's Total Leadership program? The second would be to test and adapt the Total Leadership approach in non-Anglo-Saxon countries, where the concepts of work, home, self, and community might differ. In Latin countries, for instance, the concept of community is much more diffuse, so that the self and community domains may need to merge or be reorganized in other ways.

In conclusion, *Total Leadership* is a must-read for scholars interested in leadership, change, and work-life, and also for anyone curious about "four-way wins" among different domains of life. Moreover, it is a book worth revisiting every few years, particularly during major life transitions.

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