

INTRODUCTION



The Way of the Rhino

Ancient wisdom says that when the student is ready, the master will appear. I never imagined that my master would weigh four thousand pounds and come charging at me with horns on its head!

Truth comes from all directions, in many shapes and guises, and often in surprising ways. This explains how the rhinoceros became my unlikely guru, my guide on my journey toward leadership mastery. And as you read this book, the rhino will become your guide, too.

I saw my first rhino where you probably saw yours—at the zoo. It was an enormous black rhino, and to the pleasure of the small crowd gathered around its enclosure, it was charging intently and fearlessly at another rhino. In truth, I’m not really a zoo person, and for that matter, I’m not all that crazy about wild animals. I went to the zoo for the same reason many people do—because my kids wanted to go. But something about that rhino and the way it charged grabbed my attention immediately. An inner voice said, “Take notice. There’s something important to be learned here.”

Soon I commenced an in-depth study of the rhino. I checked out books from the library, watched videos, surfed the Web, and made frequent return trips to the zoo. Sometimes I brought a pad of paper and sat for hours outside the rhino exhibit, jotting down notes and sketches of my observations as bewildered families stared in wonder.

The more I learned, the more excited I became as I recognized a host of traits that made the rhino exceptional. Everything I learned about the rhino could be applied to my personal quest to live well and successfully as a leader. Small details of the rhino’s attitude, behavior, and appearance, even its third toe and its thick skin,

started to carry a deeper meaning for me. The more I discovered, the more I wanted to share these life-altering revelations with others. This book is the culmination of that journey, and it offers you the chance to learn all the leadership lessons that, with the help of the rhino, I've garnered in my own life.

Rhinoceroses may not be the most beautiful of God's creatures (except, perhaps, to other rhinos), but they are powerful and impressive animals. Watch a rhino long enough and you can't help but feel a great deal of respect for its sheer size and strength. Keep watching, however, and you'll find that underneath its imposing exterior is a much more complex animal than initially meets the eye.

If you haven't seen any rhinos lately, keep in mind that they are the second largest land mammal, smaller only than the elephant. Adult rhinos are approximately seventy inches tall measured at the shoulder, weigh one to two tons or more, and have a life span of approximately thirty-five years. They carry their young for about sixteen months, a prospect sure to awe any mother who knows how trying a mere nine months can be. And rhinos mature at a remarkable rate: a baby rhino is capable of eating grass and leaves on its own only a week after birth.

Rhinos have thick skin, three toes on each foot, ears that are almost comically oversized, and smallish eyes. Their massive noses afford them an excellent sense of smell, an important survival mechanism in the harsh world they live in. They use their energy sparingly, rarely engaging in tussles with other species and fighting other rhinos only over territory or female company.

The best-known feature of the rhino is, of course, its horn. In fact, rhino horns are so highly prized in many African, Asian, and Middle Eastern countries that poachers continue to kill these magnificent animals, almost to the point of extinction, despite international laws and treaties forbidding it. In addition, it's becoming

harder and harder for a rhino to find a place to call home. In some parts of the world, its natural habitat has been stripped of trees, which are needed for lumber. In India, the land where rhinos live and forage is increasingly being converted to rice paddies to feed an ever-growing population. For all its strength, the rhino, it seems, can't catch a break.

Perhaps what drew me back to the zoo after that first day was the rhino's uncertain plight or the fact that I have always appreciated and identified with the underdog. But as I continued to study rhinos, I learned to admire their every move. I watched them alone and with others—playing, eating, resting, fighting, snorting, charging, shrieking (they have an extensive vocabulary of grunts, snorts, and shrieks), and rolling in the mud. Before long, I began to see rhinos through a different lens than most casual zoo-goers. Yes, rhinos are big and powerful, but they are also soft and diplomatic. They might usually be slow and cautious, but they can be fast and bold when the situation calls for it. They are fierce, strong-willed, and independent but also docile, nurturing, and loyal.

In short, the rhinoceros represents a bundle of contradictions that somehow collectively balance each other and make sense. Before my eyes, the rhino slowly revealed itself to me as a majestic tower of wisdom, the perfect metaphor for what it takes to be a leader in today's complex world. The rhino might not be as large as the elephant, as farsighted as the eagle, as swift as the cheetah, as powerful as the jaguar, or as agile as the mountain lion. And yet the traits it possesses, I realized, are exactly what it takes to succeed as a leader today. The rhinoceros symbolizes the vision, understanding, communication, power, endurance, conviction, support, heart, and, most important, the balance that those desiring to be leaders must integrate into their lives.

We all struggle to find the balance in life that rhinos, no matter how ungainly they appear, achieve effortlessly on their three-toed

hooves. We all seek equilibrium between who we are and who we want to become; between our inner world and the chaotic environment we are a part of; between our work life and our home life; between profit and principle, power and wisdom, strength and compassion, might and heart. Ultimately, how well we achieve this balance determines not only the sense of purpose and joy we will find in life but also the success we will have in leading our organizations, communities, and families toward the future we envision.

The rhino is an endangered species; so is the true leader. Our country, and indeed humanity as a whole, is in a stage of global transformation, and we are at an unmistakable crossroads in history. The choices we make today will dictate not only the quality of life tomorrow for our children and grandchildren but also whether there will even be a tomorrow at all. We often find the world, our nation, our organizations, our communities, and even our families deeply divided about the best road to take, the best decisions, the best approaches. The world's diverse and ever-expanding economy leads many of us to feel a sense of unease and insecurity about the future. This crossroads has become a battleground of conflicting ideas, approaches, and philosophies. All too often, the "right" approach for an organization, institution, or society is sacrificed for whatever is considered the "strongest" approach.

What will bring us back from the brink? The answer is simple: courageous leadership. The root of the word "courage" is *coeur*, French for "heart." Today's most successful leaders, the ones whose visions and programs endure, are not the autocrats and dictators of times past but those who approach leadership as an art form, those able to influence others to buy in to a vision that takes into account not just the ends but the means as well. Almost a century ago, the great author Napoleon Hill wrote in his classic, *Think and Grow Rich*, "No wealth or position or wealth can long endure unless built upon truth and justice."¹ Recent events, such as Enron's collapse

amidst a heap of lies and improper accounting methods, have made Hill's words ring truer than ever.

In times past, CEOs ruled with the authoritative flair of the emperors of ancient Rome. No longer. In his book *Revolt in the Boardroom*, *Wall Street Journal* columnist Alan Murray wrote of the post-Enron fall of the imperial CEO. He gave three examples: Carly Fiorina, former head of Hewlett-Packard, who was brought down by her board of directors because she was perceived to be too arrogant, aloof, out of touch, and unwilling to share power and authority; Harry Stonecipher, former CEO of Boeing, who was forced to resign by his board within weeks after the appearance of sexually inappropriate e-mails between the married CEO and a female Boeing employee with whom he was having an affair; and Maurice R. "Hank" Greenberg, who ran AIG, one of America's largest insurance companies, with an iron hand until evidence came to light of financial double-dealing that he had either authorized or tolerated.

If not for the Enron scandal, these CEOs might never have been forced to leave their multimillion-dollar posts and their transgressions might never have come to light. But today, board members of corporations have personal responsibility for any misdeeds by their companies: if the company does something illegal, the fines come out of the board members' pockets. Members of the Enron board had to pay tens of millions of dollars out of their personal financial holdings for their role in failing to investigate more deeply the corporation's financial shenanigans. The subsequent collapse and death of Enron's accounting firm, Arthur Andersen LLP, sent a similar shock wave through the accounting industry. Now accountants are held responsible for all financial statements they sign off on for their clients. In the wake of Enron's demise, formerly untouchable leaders now have to be accountable to all the stakeholders in their world.

What does all this mean to you? As leadership expert John C. Maxwell puts it, leadership is influence. It's simply the ability to

influence others to see and do things in a certain way. Today's leader does not have the dubious luxury that top-level businesspeople, politicians, and others in power once possessed: the ability to impose one's will, unquestioned, on others. That mode of leadership is all but extinct. One vivid and potent symbol of its demise was the tearing down of a huge statue of Saddam Hussein in downtown Baghdad in 2003, shortly after the American invasion of Iraq.

The old-style, top-down, no-questions-asked leader is out of date, out of style, out of time. The new leaders recognize that to influence others, they must be able to see the road ahead, create a vision, and find acceptable ways to induce others to share that vision. New-style leaders must be willing to charge ahead when necessary, pull back when appropriate, and "get down there in the mud" with those they lead—just like a rhinoceros.

If a bull or elephant could be viewed as a means of old-style leadership, thrusting ahead relentlessly when provoked, trampling everything underfoot without regard for those who share its turf, the rhino symbolizes the new kind of leader the world needs today: patient, thick-skinned, aware of the presence and needs of others. That's why, to me, the rhino is the perfect metaphor for leadership today. And this is as true for a Fortune 100 organization like Hewlett-Packard, a nation, or a community as it is for a PTA, a high school football team, or a family.

We must all be leaders—we all need to develop and implement visions of the way life *should* be rather than simply follow along with the way life is. The problem is that while the necessary leadership skills are intuitive to the rhino, they must be learned by most of the rest of us. Thus the need for this book. In each chapter you'll find a different aspect of the rhino's nature on display, and you'll see how the lessons this extraordinary animal offers can be put to work in developing your own leadership skills.

“Adaptive Leadership”—a catch phrase in the modern business world—means having a vision, influencing others, and making a difference. The most successful form of Adaptive Leadership practiced now is what many call “servant leadership.” Servant leaders recognize that their authority is not a function of how loud they can yell or how frightening they can appear. Instead, today’s wise leaders grasp that the essence of leadership is serving others—those on their team, those who work for them, and those in the world around them such as customers, prospects, the community, or the government.

A leader in a family or a community needs the same rhino-inspired skills as an individual who commands a corporation or a nation. In this book, I want to share with you an understanding of servant leadership based on the rhino principles we will discover together. The key word here will be “authenticity.” It’s hard to get people to act on our vision unless they trust that we are being honest with them—and with ourselves. The Bible, famously quoted by Abraham Lincoln in his “House Divided” speech in 1858, tells us that “a house divided against itself cannot stand.” A leader’s personality divided into unmatched parts cannot stand. It is impossible to reconcile the appearance of integrity with deep-seated character flaws, or the desire to project an image of honesty with no underlying commitment to the truth.

Society hungers for leaders who can bridge distances between individuals, groups, and conflicting ideas—gaps that often seem insurmountable. This is just as true in the business world as it is in politics, in our communities, and in our homes. Regardless of the scope or size of our spheres of influence, if we wish to be leaders we must reflect and unite all the voices and experiences in our domains, not just the polar extremes. And no matter what political pundits may say, we are not simply red states or blue states, conservatives or

liberals, any more than we are just black or white, young or old, educated or illiterate, blue collar or white collar. Rather, we are a people of nuances, subtle differences, and unique characteristics.

We are schoolchildren, baby boomers, Gen Xers, and retired people. We are brown, yellow, beige, amber, and primrose. We are old money, new money, middle class, cash poor, working class, and destitute. We are high school and college educated, self-taught, and PhD's. We are Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Buddhists, Taoists, Muslims, agnostics, and atheists. We are not one thing or the other thing but many shades of the same thing, all doing what we can, in our own ways, to make better lives for our families, our communities, our workplaces, our government, and ourselves.

Wise leaders will see the beauty and strength in these differences, realizing that within this same tapestry of diversity come individuality, perspective, and passion—the unlikely power that will build consensus and drive an organization forward.

It isn't easy being a rhino. Threats from poachers and others who encroach on the rhino's living spaces continue at full force. It's not easy to be a leader today, either. Adaptive leaders must grasp and develop all the skills that the rhino so neatly symbolizes: vision, understanding, communication, power, endurance, conviction, support, and, heart.

Leaders must stake out the high ground above self-interest and personal agenda; they should act upon what they believe and know to be true and right and not just what is popular or easy. To put it another way, leaders must be well-rounded, fully developed, and authentic human beings. That's the new paradigm for leadership throughout the world.

As we explore the mind, body, and heart of the magnificent rhino, I invite you to take a journey toward the realization of your own potential. It's a quest that will inevitably lead you to ask the

questions we so often hear about leadership: Are great leaders born or made? Will I uncover something that I already have inside me, or will I be creating something new?

Great leaders are revealed—to others, certainly, but also to themselves. The revelation doesn't happen all at once. Slowly, sometimes without warning and often with just a soft whisper in the ear, a push to reach out, take a step, and make a difference soon becomes a nudge that grows into a call to stand up and make a simple choice: to act or not to act.

That's the moment when leaders must ask themselves a deeper, more profound question: What do I want my life to stand for?

The choice is always ours. We can stay put, or we can run with the rhinos. We can settle for the safety and comfort of the status quo, or we can embrace the challenge to become leaders who will break through the boundaries of mediocrity, going beyond what others are doing and what others expect of themselves, beyond what is ordinary and commonplace, to journey across the bridge from who we are now to what we are capable of becoming.

In this unrealized potential, we will find the power to create, heal, transform, unite, and, above all, lead. We all have the potential to quietly inspire others to follow, not because they have to but because they want to and because they recognize that we offer them a chance to achieve their own goals.

This unrealized potential holds the promise of a richer and more rewarding life—a life of purpose, authenticity, and service. Here we will find the power to make a genuine and lasting difference in the lives of our organization.

How do we get there?

Follow the rhino and let the journey begin.