

Success Talks: Conversations with Everyday Leaders

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This compilation of interviews with eighteen “everyday leaders” provides an interesting, intimate look at leadership.

“Leadership” is one of those sometimes elusive qualities that is not easy to define, which may be the reason so many business books focus on the topic. *Success Talks*, by Maria Pantalone, is a bit different from other leadership books; rather than delivering the author’s views, this book presents the perspectives of others.

Pantalone, who runs a leadership consulting firm, chose eighteen individuals she classifies as “everyday leaders.” This is a distinguishing characteristic of *Success Talks*, since most such books quote noted leadership authorities. The author wisely chose a broadly diverse group—men and women of varying ages and ethnicities in a variety of fields, including education, engineering, community groups, finance, law, and medicine.

Pantalone does an admirable job of interviewing each leader. While she asks the same basic questions of every person, she occasionally departs from her script, adding questions related to specific answers. A number of her questions are to be expected—for example, “What does leadership mean to you?”—but others are a bit more intriguing, such as, “What are your views about leadership in a changing world economic climate?” and “Over the next ten years, what do you see as the major leadership issues for organisations?”

The answers offered by the leaders run the gamut, from verbose to concise. Their comments seem to have been reproduced verbatim, which adds some insight into the personalities of the participants. Despite the diversity of the group, it is striking to see thematic similarities from one interview to another. Many of the leaders, for example, indicate that integrity, honesty, and authenticity are key leadership traits. Several of them also point out that good leaders admit when they are wrong and are not afraid to let subordinates demonstrate leadership qualities.

The book’s format makes for easy reading. A photo of each leader is accompanied by a quote of their choosing, followed by a brief biography. The interview questions are in bold text to set them apart from the answers.

There are, however, two inherent weaknesses to *Success Talks*. First, the majority of the leaders are from Australia, creating a geocentric focus. While leadership is certainly a global topic and comments from Australian leaders are relevant, readers from other countries may find this to be a limitation. Second, despite the common thread that runs through the interviews, observations from the author are missing. Pantalone’s comments in a closing chapter might have made this feel more like a complete book and less like a series of conversations. A section for additional reading or resources might also have strengthened the book. Still, *Success Talks* presents an interesting, intimate look at leadership from people who work at it every day.

BARRY SILVERSTEIN (August 7, 2015)

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