Second Star to the Right

Essays on Leadership in Star Trek

Edited by

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Series in Cinema and Culture



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Introduction: A Transdisciplinary Trek Through Leadership

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Abstract

Over the decades, *Star Trek* has provided us with models of leadership through its captains, characters, and sometimes even villains. This chapter will introduce the reader to the relevance of *Star Trek* canon as it relates to a diversity of leadership development. It will situate the experiences of the editors relative to canon and the basic leadership skills of communication, patience, and relationship. It will follow this introductory set with a description of the subsequent chapters of the book in order to guide the reader through the text.

Keywords: *Star Trek*, leadership, leadership development, communication, patience, relationship

A few years ago, we found ourselves becoming disillusioned with the state of training in leadership development. Graduate students arrived at our programs eager to learn how to lead toward a better tomorrow, but we remained dissatisfied with the typical resources available to teach them. There was no lack of overpriced leadership textbooks available for course adoption. Yet, those texts were almost invariably based upon scant empirical evidence, anecdotal reports, or nothing more than elaborated catch phrases. Jason consequently began to assemble a readily teachable skill set tested through his own experience and seemingly supported by the available literature as a tool for his students. This effort eventually matured through countless discussions with Aaron into a set of three basic leadership skills that can be applied by

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aspiring leaders in a manner agnostic to situation or urgency. *Communication* is crucial for successful leadership, especially in the modern age when so much of how we interact with others is via email and other digital means. It prompts leaders, both current and aspiring, to truly confirm that what they are saying or typing is being received in the manner they intended. *Patience* is something from which we could all benefit. Leading amidst a 24/7 news cycle means that there is no time during the day or night when a leader might not be called upon to respond to a problem. A key aspect to communicating well as a leader is taking that necessary internal pause to first consider what we need to say before saying it. *Relationship* is the bedrock of effective leadership. Organizations are comprised of people, and those people bring to work their needs, anxieties, and aspirations. It behooves leaders to recognize that they manage individuals, not units.

Nonetheless, there remained a pervasive lack of good leadership models in the news and popular media upon which we could draw as case studies for our students. There were few examples whom we could readily identify as worthy of emulation. Alternatively, we already had been utilizing the captains of *Star Trek* to serve as exemplars of logical, compassionate, and humble leadership. As Yu et al. (2022) somewhat overstated, already at this point "using popular culture from films, as well as television, is a proven educational tool to enhance lessons taught in leadership education" (p. 170). By this point, the world was nearly one year into the global pandemic and Jason began to feel a deep internal pull, almost an obligation, to write about the potential of *Star Trek* to inform leadership development. Never one to back down from a challenge, Aaron agreed to enlist in the mission. The result has been an ongoing project that has taken us through a number of wonderfully unanticipated steps.

It's Been a Long Road...

We were inspired by the "grand captains" to write our first book demonstrating how *Star Trek* can be utilized to model Enlightenment thinking in leadership. According to Kant (1784, as cited in Bristow, 2017), such thinking was characterized by a growing awareness that no questions were off limits. It was time during which humanity began to grow beyond its reliance on myth to make sense of the world (Armstrong, 2005) and instead rely upon reason as exemplified in the burgeoning scientific method (Weber, 1897). We recognized that bigotry remained rampant during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; it still does today. Yet, the Enlightenment also provided to humanity a recognition of how reason and compassion can be utilized to promote human growth. Thus, in our first book, we focused on how the basic leadership skills of communication, patience, and relationship can be leveraged to guide reasonand compassion-based leadership for graduate-level and corporate training.

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However, as we neared the end of writing that first book, it became obvious to us that we had missed a key element in the potential of *Star Trek* to inform leadership.

More times than not, the captains of our favorite starships and stations lead not merely with reason and compassion, but also with humility. They put their people and missions ahead of their own ego needs. We were especially inspired by the recent adventures of Captain Christopher Pike. Here was a character who seemed to have been written with leadership in mind. Pike stood out to us with his ability to keep his own needs out of the proverbial equation. Whether helping two warring factions to seek rapprochement or providing the social space for an aspiring officer to take the helm, Pike impressed us as an exceptional and currently relevant model for more advanced leaders to hone their skill set. As Callahan et al. (2007) observed, "the stories we choose to help facilitate leadership development will ultimately impact a leader's cultural script" (p. 158). The result was a second book that took a deep dive into the psychological research on how to practice humble leadership.

However, as we finished writing that second book, a thought nagged at us. Who were we, as two mere individuals, to set the standards of humility in leadership? We might know the research and have a combined wealth of experience, but neither of us possesses a crystal ball nor a Ferengi thought maker sphere when it comes to decision-making in leadership. We instead reached the only logical conclusion; we sought the expertise of others from a global array of scholars and creators with diverse perspectives. The book you now hold in your hands is the product of that decision, and we think it is something special because of the caliber and multiplicity of the voices within it.

On the Bridge

Before we provide an overview of the journey ahead, it is probably not surprising to you that our own practice of leadership has been powerfully influenced by the presence of *Star Trek* in our lives. Jason grew up coincident with the very first *Star Trek* films but became hooked as an adolescent with the debut of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (Roddenberry et al., 1987-1994). He was immediately taken not merely by the technology and action, but even more so by the honor portrayed as inherent to a career in Starfleet, the loyalty among the bridge crew demonstrated in almost every episode, and the reliance on thinking over phasers to solve problems. Later, as an adult teaching leadership, he remained impressed with the franchise's ability to portray these and other characteristics so relevant to the practice of leadership. Aaron was first introduced to *Star Trek* by his mother when he was in middle school. She first showed him a few episodes of *Star Trek: The Original Series* (Roddenberry, 1966-1969), and he was immediately drawn to it in spite of its somewhat dated

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appearance. Aaron especially came to appreciate the relationship dynamics among Kirk, Spock, and McCoy. They would challenge each other while trusting one another. Later, Aaron and his mom also bonded over *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (Roddenberry et al., 1987-1994); it is a series they still really enjoy to this day. However, his favorite centers on his most beloved Starfleet captain, Christopher Pike. He thinks that *Star Trek: Strange New Worlds* (Roddenberry et al., 2022-present) strikes the perfect update to canon while setting forth a model of leadership.

Nonetheless, what the combined intellect and experience of the authors of this anthology bring to the ready room table is far in excess of what either of us could have hoped to provide on our own. We are grateful for the opportunity to share it with you. The chapters ahead provide insights into leadership, through the lens of *Star Trek*, across a diverse array of disciplines academic and professional. This last point is important. This anthology is an academic book, but its scope is not narrowly academic. Our overarching purpose of assembling the following chapters is to provide a highly approachable resource for leaders essentially regardless of their professional bent. It can be used as readily for professional training as it could incorporated into academic curricula. Whether you hail from the sciences, engage in the arts, or work behind a camera or script, there is something here for you.

To Boldly Go...

This book offers a set of eighteen chapters organized into seven themes reflective of the affordances of sixty years of stories in canon as they relate to leadership. When we put out the call for chapters, our goal was to solicit a truly robust set of ideas from authors representing the beautiful diversity of thought and perspective representative of the *Star Trek* ethos. The result is a range of chapters written in approaches that widely differ. We are humbled by the caliber of all of the thinkers willing to lend their unique voices to this anthology. The ideas that comprise the following chapters reveal a depth and breadth of leadership through the lens of canon far in excess of what we thought possible and, in every way, better than what we might have offered on our own. Is this not the core tenet of *Star Trek*? By putting our minds together toward a problem, in this case the question of leadership, we can promote the flourishing of everyone.

Challenges

The first theme is *challenges*. Think of your favorite episode or film from the franchise. We suspect that it features a significant problem to be solved, one that requires a novel solution, teamwork, a change of mind, quite a bit of technobabble, or all of the above. Leadership is the daily practice of navigating

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unscripted problems. The day-to-day business of leading an organization, be it large or small, often presents the unexpected. This is what makes leadership so interesting, and sometimes so difficult. *Star Trek* provides ample cases in which our favorite captains and their crew rise to meet a range of challenges which variably require tending to the needs of the people involved while seeking solutions to emergent challenges.

In Chapter 1, "A Tall Ship and a Star to Steer Her By: The Sacrifice of the Captain's Chair", Aaron M. Peterson considers the issue of conflict engagement in leadership. This is an important issue typically ignored in leadership development. Some leaders are taught how to engage with conflict, but most probably learned the requisite skill set on the job, if at all. Attention is even more rarely afforded regarding how to handle a situation when the needs of the leader differ from the needs of their crew. Such a situation is not uncommon. This chapter explores how a leader can navigate such issues with genuineness, even when they are called upon to make personal sacrifices to do so.

In Chapter 2, "Friendship, Loyalty, and Whistle-blowing in *Star Trek*", Bradley Chilton explores the role of loyalty in leadership by posing the question of just how far a leader should be loyal to their crew. *Star Trek* canon is replete with examples of officers being loyal to one another, sometimes to a fault. This tendency is demonstrated through explicit dialogue as well as implicit decision-making in countless episodes and a number of the films. Indeed, there are few captains who at one time or another are not scolded for putting an individual before the greater good. This chapter proposes that there exists an optimal degree of loyalty before becoming detrimental to the mission.

In Chapter 3, "Getting to Hlja': What 'The Devil in the Dark' Can Teach Us About Adaptive Leadership and Conflict Resolution," Scott Maravilla returns to the matter of conflict, but from the perspective of mediation to seek meaningful resolution for both parties to an argument. A number of *Star Trek* captains are notable for their emphasis on seeking peaceful negotiation over forced compliance. The Galaxy is a big place and conflict often occurs between individuals and societies who not only maintain different expectations, but operate from different norms of behavior and criteria for success. The relevance to modern times is clear. This chapter ponders the value of remaining responsive in leadership to new ideas, especially those that might challenge one's preconceived notions.

In Chapter 4, "Human Beings Cannot Survive as a Species Without Extraterrestrial Interference," Michael Dismuke stretches our imaginations to consider the science-fiction trope that an extraterrestrial intelligence might be required to effectively motivate wholesale positive change across human civilization. Human mythology is replete with examples of how an external guide is often necessary to prompt growth. It is a theme common across

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cultures and recorded history. Some such stories relate incidents profound to the individual, while others suggest events cataclysmic to entire peoples. This chapter considers parallels between extraterrestrial influences as depicted in *Star Trek* and the rich tapestry of stories told among human cultures back home on Earth.

Opportunities

The second theme is *opportunities*. Although it may be a truism that challenges are inherent to leadership, the reality is that being a leader also involves seeking as well as creating opportunities for individual and organizational growth. The overarching tale of *Star Trek* is one of progress through enlightened thinking. With their reliance on reason coupled to compassion, the films and series of canon represent a forward-looking orientation guided by a set of implicit questions. How can we grow as individuals while improving as a society? How can technology be advanced and leveraged for the betterment of all? How can we find meaning in life and create opportunities for others to do so?

In Chapter 5, "The ABCs of Effective Mentorship in the Lab and Across the Stars," Michael Wong investigates the role of agency in the mentoring relationship. A theme common across the *Star Trek* franchise is the importance of personal autonomy. Whether on an away mission, in the lab, or in service of one's own professional development, it is important for each member of the crew to feel ownership and a sense of autonomy over their projects. Just as leaders grow through experience, so too can they facilitate growth in their crew. Ideally, such empowered motivation is guided by a supportive mentor. This chapter explores the importance of promoting growth in one's crew members without micromanaging their progress.

In Chapter 6, "Kill your Darlings: A Meta Look at Collaboration and Storytelling", Drew Nichols expounds upon the importance of collaboration in leadership. Few major achievements in the modern world seem to be accomplished by individuals alone. This is as true in television production as it is in the other arts, humanities, and sciences. Significant accomplishments often require a crew working together toward a set of mutual goals. However, therein lies a potential rub. Collaboration can carry with it the risk of shunning novel input. A dissenting voice can be lost among the social inertia of a group's inertia. This chapter navigates the sometimes difficult choices inherent in moving forward together.

In Chapter 7, "Modeling Corporate Compassion and Empathy in *Star Trek*," Bradley O. Browne asserts the importance of compassion and empathy to the practice of business. Corporations have historically prized productivity as their primary motive for operation. Indeed, such large businesses have a fiduciary

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responsibility to their shareholders to deliver a regular profit. This obligation tends to promote a focus on short-term success over long-term organizational well-being. The result can be employee burnout, loss of highly trained individuals, and decreased productivity due to worker stress. This chapter explores the importance of treating one's crew as a set of individuals who benefit from care and cohesion to foster a sustainably desirable workplace.

In Chapter 8, "The Needs of the Many: *Star Trek*'s Unification Principle of Heroic Leadership," Scott Allison and James Beggan consider the potential for heroes to bring a crew together toward common goals. *Star Trek* is famous for both its captains and their nemeses. However, one major differentiator among such individuals is that villains tend to separate people, while heroes work to unite them. The result of such unification is that it can foster a more highly performing crew. *Star Trek* takes this notion even farther through the implicit message that the future can be one of broad unification among peoples with diverse perspectives. This chapter considers how leadership can promote the flourishing of cooperation among diversity.

Equity

The third theme is *equity*. These have been a foundation of *Star Trek* since its debut in 1966. In every generation, the franchise has promoted the beauty of diversity across people and ideas in a manner relevant for its time. The most recent series especially have made plain the centrality of racial, gender, and cultural equity to canon. Indeed, from its very beginning, *Star Trek* has promulgated the importance of *IDIC*, the concept that through an infinite diversity of peoples and their perspectives can arise an infinite combination of novel ideas. This is an area in which *Star Trek* truly excels as a guiding light for leaders.

In Chapter 9, "Star Trek's Universal Principles: A Study in Leadership," Derek Tyler Attico explores the scope of Star Trek canon as a model for leadership. Current events around the world make clear that bigotry remains very much a problem among humanity. Fortunately, the series and films of Star Trek offer a wealth of examples to guide leaders in the promotion of diversity, equity, and inclusion through both overt and tacit mechanisms. Canon provides an avenue through which leaders can welcome peoples from all walks of life to their crews. This chapter demonstrates how leading with diversity in mind can help to bring forth the future envisioned in our favorite franchise.

In Chapter 10, "No Room for Bigotry on the Bridge: *Star Trek*, DEI, and Cultural Competence," Emily Strand reveals how *Star Trek* provides leaders an opportunity to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion even amidst the most recalcitrant of social environments. The franchise offers a toolbox of sorts for

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promoting cultural competence among leaders. *Star Trek* has repeatedly introduced diversity through its cast representation and explored societally challenging themes courtesy of narrative experimentation. This chapter considers how canon has resultantly dealt with socially fraught topics through the guise of science-fiction and how leaders can capitalize on this approach to lead for change among their own crews.

Emotions

The fourth theme is *emotions*. Although effective leadership is best driven by logical decision-making, the reality is that people are not rational beings. *Star Trek* has traditional recognized the emotions can serve a purpose in leadership. Instead of being something to fully suppress, emotions can provide an additional lens through which to consider difficult situations. They offer a secondary avenue of information-processing to better consider a greater range of situational variables. As importantly, *Star Trek* has repeatedly demonstrated the importance of keeping one's emotions in check so that they inform judgment without clouding it.

In Chapter 11, "Kathryn Janeway: A Leader with Feeling," Laurie Ulster explores how emotions can be utilized as a source of strength in leadership. Western thinking has historically eschewed the use of emotions as second-class experiences. Yet, emotions can be understood in a very real way as a basic form of problem-solving. In addition to understanding the world through ideas, we can also understand situations through feelings. Every leader knows from personal experience that emotions, for better and worse, are part of the job. This chapter demonstrates how effective leadership incorporates emotion as a guide for the intellect and a tool for connecting with crew members.

In Chapter 12, "Keeping Khan Under Pressure: A Cognitive Behavioral Framework for Enhancing Emotional Regulation," David Smith and Jason von Stietz consider the fundamental importance of emotional regulation to successful leadership. Emotions are a fact of life. Of course, some days feel better than others. What matters more than what one experiences emotionally in the moment is that they meaningfully integrate the emotional experience into their daily decisions. There are various ways to regulate one's emotions, but they are not all equally adaptive. Cognitive-behavioral therapy provides a scientifically vetted set of resources that can guide leaders toward greater psychological wellbeing. This chapter unveils how such practices can promote improved distress tolerance when the going gets tough.

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Education and Ethics

The fifth theme is *education and ethics*. Education is a topic that, quite frankly, has not received a lot of attention in canon. Starfleet officers are typically portrayed as individuals expected to assert logic over feeling regardless of the situation. Yet, *Star Trek* concurrently promotes the development of the whole person, and there are examples of doing so in action. As the most capable leaders know, emotions are part of life and can add value and meaning to leadership when handled with care. Similarly, one of the most emphatic ways that *Star Trek* stands out as unique among other science-fiction stories is its focus on ethical action. From the acting ensign to the fleet admiral, Starfleet personnel are taught the importance of integrity, dignity, and inquiry. Without these qualities, it can be difficult to wear the uniform.

In Chapter 13, "Go Boldly: Hologram Janeway as Teacher and Leader," Kelli Fitzpatrick explores how *Star Trek* has modelled a range of educational concepts and practices to instruct the next generation of leaders. Over its multidecadal history, the world has experienced numerous challenges due to war, famine, and hate. Humanity has also experienced times of progress and growth, sometimes small and other times great. Through it all, stories in canon have rarely shied away from truly difficult topics. Several captains especially have demonstrated a willingness to wade into the ethical unknown and teach therein, taking different paths that can inform leaders while also presenting their own moral questions. This chapter critically examines specific examples of how Hologram Janeway served as a teacher and leader to her young crew.

In Chapter 14, "The Weight of Command: Controversial Leadership in *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*'s 'In the Pale Moonlight'," Sebastian Stoppe considers how *Star Trek* handles issues of controversial leadership in service of the greater good. As many leaders know, doing what is right is sometimes difficult. Doing what is ethically sound in the moment can even yield problematic downstream effects. Indeed, some choices in leadership present no entirely ethical solutions. What is a leader to do amidst such dilemmas when no clearly acceptable path presents itself? When is it acceptable to flex the definition of, or even depart from, what is considered ethical? This chapter navigates the question through the lens of multiple ethical perspectives.

Explorations

The sixth theme is *explorations*. As the introductory monologue states, *Star Trek* is all about exploring new worlds and new civilizations. It invites us to consider ideas and opportunities that might be novel to us as individuals but that become evident through interactions with others. Whether studying to become an officer or sitting around a gaming table, *Star Trek* beckons us to ask

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ourselves what comes next. Sometimes, this requires that we look to the past, other times that we engage in a bit of futurism.

In Chapter 15, "Producing the Future: Starfleet Academy and the United States Naval Academy," Claude Berube provides a novel comparison between the education afforded at the United States Naval Academy and that proffered to the cadets of Starfleet Academy. Although the latter institution currently remains fictional, considering their respective curricula can provide useful fodder for aspiring and expert leaders alike as they seek to burnish their skills. Both institutions focus on the holistic education of their students, albeit in different and sometimes fictional situations. This chapter explores how such an education of the future can offer novel developmental opportunities while demonstrating that some elements are likely to remain invariant over time.

In Chapter 16, "From Game Room to Ready Room: Developing Leadership Skills with *Star Trek* Tabletop Roleplaying Games," Jim Johnson demonstrates the potential of tabletop roleplaying games to inform the practice of leadership. *Star Trek* has a long history of representation among such games dating back to the 1970s. As anyone who has played these or similar games knows, the social dynamics of either running or engaging in a tabletop roleplaying game can offer relevant lessons for life and leadership. Enacting a character on one's favorite starship or station carries with it the potential to take on new roles with expectations different from one's daily life. This chapter presents how time at the table provide moments of shared learning that can serve as a crucible for leadership development.

In Chapter 17, "William Shakespeare's Journey on the *Enterprise*," James LeDuc provides an overview of how *Star Trek* has routinely incorporated the works of Shakespeare into its stories. Sometimes subtle and at other times overt, the Bard has been an ever-present voice in canon over the decades. Courtesy of his insights into the human condition, the plays and sonnets of Shakespeare can provide a means to explore the beneficent as well as the problematic aspects of leadership with the goal of encouraging organizational transformation. This chapter focuses on specific cases from the franchise to elucidate how leaders might better capitalize on *Star Trek* to humanely inform their practice.

These Are the Voyages...

The seventh theme is *these are the voyages....* At the end of the shift, nothing that *Star Trek* teaches us really matters one does not treat their crew with a sense of dignity. Core to such an approach is learning how to be humble. Across nearly six decades of leadership among the stars, many of our favorite captains demonstrated how relaxing the ego and instead focusing on crew and mission

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promoted the greatest success. This is a lesson not learned by all of the captains. However, we can learn a great deal from those who maintained humility even in the most pressing of situations.

In Chapter 18, "Humble Leadership and the Grand Captains of *Star* Trek," Jason A. Kaufman explores how humility is one of the key characteristics common among almost all of the grand captains of Star Trek. Although one might not think of the captains as being overly humble, the reality is that they each demonstrate a mix of intellectual as well as interpersonal humility. Any captain might become angry with themselves or their situations. Yet, treating a crew member with disrespect is always portrayed as a significant, and significantly problematic, event. This chapter explores how each of the captains of the silver and digital screens can serve as an exemplar of humble leadership.

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