



The 100-Mile Walk

Sander A. Flaum, CEO of Flaum Partners, wondered how his students at the Leadership Forum at Fordham Graduate School of Business viewed “leadership.” Since his son, Jonathon, founder/CEO of WriteMind Communications, is the same age as many of Sander’s students, Sander thought about asking his son. Over six months, the two walked 100 miles and shared their views on leadership as well as learned more about each other.

Sander, a 65-year-old traditional CEO, took his son on strolls of municipalities and his golf club, while his son Jonathon, a 35-year-old Zen entrepreneur, took Sander on hikes in more rustic environments. The two men agreed on nine key traits and practices essential to all leaders—from principles and passion to performance and even—paranoia. Their trek and conclusions are published in their book *The 100-Mile Walk: A Father and Son on a Quest to Find the Essence of Leadership* by Sander A. Flaum and Jonathon A. Flaum with Michele Flaum.

MWorld interviewed father and son. We also share here an excerpt from the book—on the father and son’s perspectives on one of the Ps, paranoia—to show their generational differences.

SANDER’S PERSPECTIVE: NEVER TAKE YOUR EYE OFF THE BALL

I think about my business all the time. I never stop thinking about all the aspects of my business and how to improve its performance, about all the things that might go wrong even when all signs are clear skies. I focus on the mechanics of how things are working. I do not let



to Learn About Leadership

things “take care of themselves.” I know that if you let things take care of themselves, they will simply disappear into the ether. Or worse, your clients, employees and your value chain will find somewhere else to go, somewhere where someone is staying focused on their needs.

Am I paranoid about making my business and myself the absolute best? Do I obsess and try to do everything in my power to ensure positive outcomes for my clients and their customers, for my employees and for myself? Absolutely!

From my vantage point, I think you should be attuned to the knowledge that, at any time, every competitor of yours is out to recruit your best people, steal your ideas, take over your customers and reinvent and improve your products. I recommend allowing for the worst-case scenario to propel you to be better today than you were yesterday. Whether you’re in the world of business, academia, organized labor or nonprofits, a touch of paranoia is a valuable trait. The word tends to give us a jolt, and it’s meant to do that. To maintain a healthy competitive edge, a leader takes into account the possibility of her organization being spied on, stolen from, plagiarized and copied. We call it paranoia; you can call it hyper-vigilance or “high alert” status—it doesn’t matter, as long as you embed it into your organization’s culture as an antidote to complacency.

JONATHON’S PERSPECTIVE: MY GENERATION HAS A DIFFERENT WAY OF WORKING

The world of business sometimes lends itself to the language of a war—“competitive advantage,” “our company’s arsenal,” “the war room,” “hostile takeover,”—and that’s tough for me to get on board with.

My generation has a different way of working. It is based on awareness, not paranoia. For me, paranoia has negative side effects, and if I can avoid them I’d like to. The older generation that mastered this quality suffers the consequences of its side effects: a constant low-grade tension and reactivity that have become synonymous with work ethic and commitment.

My dad is onto something very important in his acknowledgement of our need to develop a positive relationship with fear. I just want to propose a slightly adjusted commentary on how we approach fear at work. Rather than always practicing control, I advocate using acceptance from time to time. We may believe that our paranoia can prevent unpredictable things from showing up, but often this is an illusion. Paranoia works—sometimes. But it also robs us of fully enjoying those times when everything is just fine. When a problem shows up that we were paranoid about, we have two problems to deal with: our tension that our paranoia sustains and the actual problem itself.

Both Sander and Jonathon were asked a series of questions. Here are their replies.

What do you see as the three most important traits or qualities of a leader?

S: Integrity, credibility and empathy, and the ability to demonstrate those traits.

J: A resolve to do the right thing, the ability to listen to others without needing to hear a specific answer and the willingness to be accountable to others

What strength of your own would you bring to a position as a leader?

S: The common sense to surround yourself with people as smart or smarter than you are.

J: My resolve to be ethical, to listen to others, and to be accountable to them.

What personal shortcoming, if any, do you most worry about in terms of your role as a business leader?

S: Passion for being the “best in class,” admittedly, doesn’t allow much compromise.

J: I am aware that I’m not a detail person by nature, and it is important that I know that about myself and make sure I surround myself with a cohort who loves the details.

Who are your leadership heroes and why? What traits or characteristics do you think you have learned from them?

S: Abraham Lincoln for overruling the majority of his Cabinet on the need for war to achieve emancipation. Also Harry Truman, a great President who ended W.W.II through remarkable leadership and for his ability to make the gut-wrenching decision regarding the use of the A-bomb. They teach in an undeniable way how tough leadership can be on the leader and the led.

J: Henry David Thoreau: he walked to the “beat of his own drum.” Thoreau said that “the volatile truth of our words should continually betray the inadequacy of the residual statement.” Thoreau’s writing leads people back to themselves and demands they look honestly at their own person and at the world around them. From Thoreau, I continue to learn that a real leader never asks another person to be like him—rather he challenges others to search out and be truly and fully themselves.

Each consider one another to answer this question: “What strengths do you admire in your son/father as a leader?”

S: Jonathon is a remarkable leader. His sense of fairness, his honesty and his innate sense of “do the right thing” have carried him to where he is today a successful creative director and well known in Asheville circles for his achievements. I’m proud to be his Dad.

J: I admire my father’s unwavering persistence and his insistence on getting the very best from his people and himself every day. I also deeply admire his profound loyalty to those he works with presently and extending back many years to the past. I see him helping his former employees long after they’ve worked for him, and that is a practice I want to carry on.

As a leader yourself, how would you help others within your organization develop their leadership ability?

S: We talk a lot about learning something new every day; and getting a little depressed if you don’t. You can learn something new from everybody and anybody. It’s about achieving to be best in class.

J: I would constantly set up situations in which my people get an opportunity to see just how far they can go and how much they can trust themselves to succeed. Once they truly trust themselves they will be comfortable in asking others to trust them—leadership will naturally flow from there, it cannot be forced. The nature of leadership is that it grows up organically not mechanically.

As a leader of an organization, where do you think your attention should lie—people, customer service, sales, all?

S: It’s always about people; giving young potential leaders the opportunity to grow and make mistakes and fix them, and moving the business forward so our clients are proud to be working with us.

J: It should lie in the people working in the organization. If they are treated well (as sort of customers themselves, if you will), they will take that example and bring it to the customer. People respond to actions so, if I treat my people badly but preach treating the customer like royalty, we will fail. Begin at home and the intention will ripple out to all corners.

What do you know now about each other or the “essence of leadership” since taking the 100-mile walk?

S: Leaders are made. Anyone who has the gumption and energy to follow and practice the 9Ps in our book can evolve into a leader. In the course of examining and debating the qualities of the incredibly successful business and not-for-profit leaders, educators, and entrepreneurs who came to speak to the MBAs at the Fordham Leadership Forum, it is my conviction that if one is prepared to exhibit the practices revealed in our book, they clearly have an advantage over their competitors in getting to the top.

J: What I have learned about the essence of leadership since taking the walk is that a great leader is not born but is made and shaped by the quality and integrity of the mission she takes up in the world.

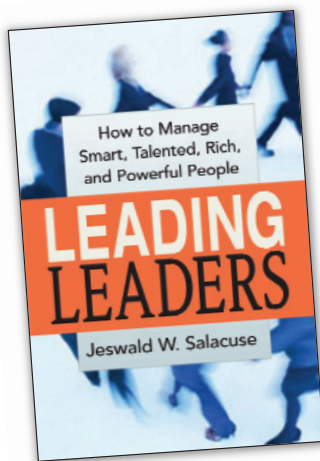
Paranoia implies placing a certain lens on reality—one that sees clouds even on a day of clear skies. I don't propose putting on rose-colored glasses. I see simple awareness, doing our best to be fully cognizant of our environment, as the antidote. This can be done with calm attention. We can see a problem at work as something not to attack but to transform. In reality, both paranoia and calm awareness probably work equally as well in pre-empting a potential disaster. Who would disagree that the side effects of the latter are so much more preferable? [mw](#)

Excerpted, by permission of the publisher, from The 100-Mile Walk: A Father and Son on a Quest to Find the Essence of Leadership by Sander A. Flaum and Jonathon A. Flaum with Michele Flaum. Published by AMACOM. For more information about this book and other AMA books, visit www.amanet.org/books

To gain insights into leadership, attend one of the following AMA seminars:

- “Developing Executive Leadership”
- “AMA’s Leading with Emotional Intelligence”
- “The Voice of Leadership: How Leaders Inspire, Influence and Achieve Results”

For information on these and other AMA seminars on leadership, visit www.amanet.org/seminars



\$27.95 • 240 pp
Hardcover • 0-8144-0855-9

AVAILABLE AT
YOUR LOCAL
BOOKSTORE
AND ONLINE!

WHEN A COMPANY IS FULL OF TOP DOGS, HOW DO YOU GET THE WHOLE PACK TO WORK TOGETHER?

LEADING LEADERS: How to Manage Smart, Talented, Rich and Powerful People
by Jeswald W. Salacuse

“Great stuff, full of revelations on making a team out of the star players in any outfit, and leading it on to victory.”

—John Galvin, General, U.S. Army, retired; former Supreme Allied Commander, NATO

The most valuable people in and around an organization are often the most difficult to manage. They are the “elites”—executives, highly-educated professionals, investors, board members, functional experts, and others—whose special talents or positions give them unusual power and independence from those who seek to lead them. Is it really possible to “manage” these achievers? *Leading Leaders* says YES, and shows you how to develop the kind of one-on-one, up-close-and-personal relationships that work with movers and shakers. You’ll learn how to get their buy-in—and leverage their expertise for outstanding results!

AMACOM THE BOOK PUBLISHING DIVISION OF
AMERICAN MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

Call us at 800-714-6395 or visit us
online at www.amacombooks.org