



# tampa bay leadership review

## BEAT THE UNBEATABLE: Leadership Insights from Mark House

by **Adepoju S. Adewale MBA '15** and **Bella L. Galperin, professor of management and associate director of the TECO Center for Leadership**

**O**n Feb. 22, 1980, a team changed the mood of a nation. The U.S. Olympic Hockey Team left an indelible mark on the sporting firmament by defeating the Soviet Union and winning the gold medal. The odds were certainly against them: The Soviets were four-time Olympic gold medalists and current world champions. On the other hand, the U.S. team had won nothing in 20 years. In addition, the Cold War was festering and the U.S. economy was on a downturn. It was clear the entire nation needed a lift, and the team provided that boost, changing the narrative for the rest of the decade and arguably for a lifetime. Often referred to as the “Miracle on Ice,” the events of that night demonstrated that leadership and teamwork can make a difference. By building an “A” team, one can beat the unbeatable.

Inevitably, the question becomes, “What is needed to build an “A” team? At the Center for Leadership’s Speaker series, Mark House, managing director of the Florida division of the Beck Group, identified the ideals of leadership and the key elements needed to build such a team. House stressed that there is no “I” in a team and that the entire team must work together to accomplish its goals. To experience progress in any human endeavor, we must build efficient teams with effective leaders. Leaders who inspire, inform and involve their teams in producing the desired results under any circumstances.



**Mark House**

House stated that “leadership is the process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction and motivation. People expect honest consideration from their leaders and, in return, they give their best to be part of something larger than themselves”. A leader inspires team members to rise above their limitations and exceed expectations against all odds.

House’s perspective is in line with recent theories on leadership. Team-centric leadership is becoming



**Adepoju S. Adewale**



**Bella L. Galperin, Ph.D.**

entrenched in management circles and the knowledge that we win and lose together makes every player contribute in the best possible way. As John C. Maxwell points out, every successful team has two essential ingredients: a common goal and a leader to clearly communicate that goal (John C. Maxwell, 2007). Team members must understand the common goals so they can work together to achieve them. However, common goals are not enough — the leader must also effectively communicate the key elements of the goal to the team members.

Mark House has the ingredients that exemplify a leader. Not only does he clearly communicate his goals, he has amassed an enviable performance record by creating a personal leadership philosophy which he uses to develop high performance teams.

During the presentation, there was a unique opportunity for the audience to reflect on and to build a template for developing a leadership philosophy. It is a simple 3-step process. First, one must recognize what one believes in. The core of every leader is what he believes; second, one needs to itemize the best leadership qualities to cultivate and the worst leadership qualities to eschew. This step ensures clearly defined standards in one’s interactions with her team. The final step in developing a leadership philosophy involves identifying one’s “hot buttons.” What are those actions or habits that he cannot tolerate in your team members? Mark House gave us a glimpse into his hot buttons, including: “Be on time for meetings or with assignments;” “Look and act like a professional,” and “Gossip is a cancer; when you hear it, speak out against it.” These are a few of the tenets that help him in creating a unique brand of team-centric leadership.

History is replete with leaders who have used these philosophies and team-centric leadership to beat the unbeatable. However, understanding how they are arrived at these principles and the necessity of developing their own philosophies proves a priceless endeavor for everyone. The impossible becomes an absurd notion when leaders arise with clear philosophies and inspire their teams.

Just as the U.S. hockey team rose to the challenge, the U.S. national team did as well this year as well at the World Cup. Though

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# FRANK GHANNADIAN'S NEW BOOK: *LEADERS AND IDEAS THAT HAVE SHAPED THE MODERN ECONOMIC WORLD: FROM ARISTOTLE TO STEVE JOBS*

by *Melissa Flohr, coordinator, centers and institutes*

**S**ynopsis: The new book by Frank Ghannadian is a series of short essays that introduce the reader to iconic figures from the ancient to the modern world, who have contributed to our modern thinking on leadership. The book creates an interest in additional reading and in learning more about these thought-provoking leaders. The book is published by Book Masters and is available on Amazon.com in both e-book and hardcover forms. We asked Prof. Frank Ghannadian, dean of the Sykes College of Business and director of the Center for Leadership, some questions about the book and its intentions.



Melissa Flohr

**Q:** What is the idea behind your book?

**A:** There are many new books almost every day in the area of leadership and they contain new insights and perspectives on modern issues and provide applications for the new world but they all have a historical background. My quest in writing this book was to look at history and thought leaders in history and to understand where the roots of modern thinking in leadership come from. Every day we make decisions and how we make those decisions, such as whether to buy a piece of property, to add an employee benefit, or to do something innovative at work comes from some historical background. So the book is really "DNA of Leadership" thought as opposed to a history of economic thought which is popular in the economics discipline.

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## **BEAT THE UNBEATABLE: Leadership Insights from Mark House**

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the odds were against them, they survived elimination from the early stages of the "group of death." Not only were the teams in this group some of the best, the U.S. team had to battle a difficult travel schedule and play in adverse weather conditions in Brazil. Despite these challenges, the U.S. team defeated Ghana, even though Ghana had sent the U.S. team home for the past two World Cups. Through immense teamwork and a winning philosophy, the U.S. soccer team had a "truly epic and memorable performance" (The Telegraph, June 17, 2014), further proof that "A" teams always come out on top.

John C. Maxwell. (2007). *Be a People Person*. Cook Publications.

The Telegraph, June 17, 2014. USA vs Ghana, World Cup 2014: as it happened. [www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/football/world-cup/10903374/USA-vs-Ghana-World-Cup-2014-as-it-happened.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/football/world-cup/10903374/USA-vs-Ghana-World-Cup-2014-as-it-happened.html)



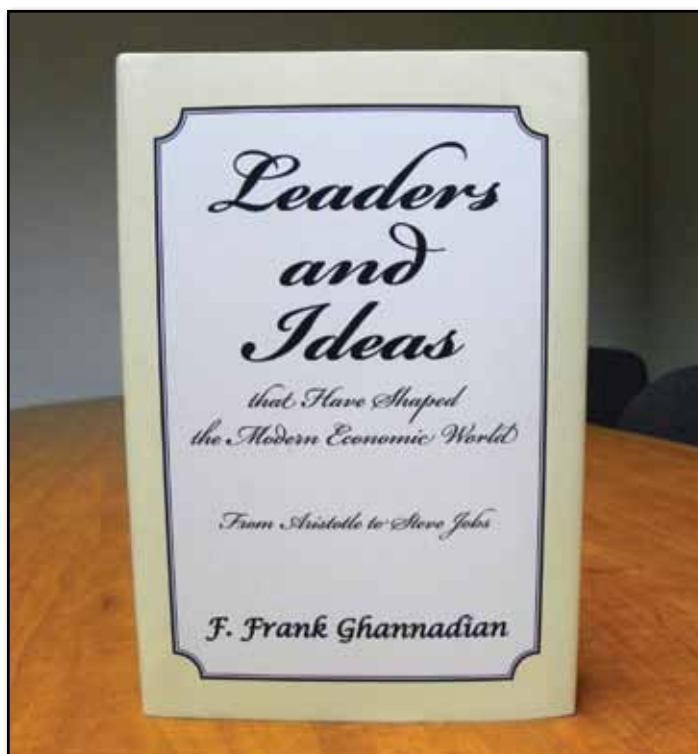
F. Frank Ghannadian, Ph.D.  
Dean, Sykes College of Business

**Q:** How did you decide which historical figures to include in the book?

**A:** Besides the time and digging by two GA's, the difficulty was to decipher how many people and what time frame. There were all kinds of leaders: politicians, military strategists, presidents and kings; and they all contributed something to our thinking. I left religious leaders out as I consider religion a different topic in itself. The question was whether to reduce this number to 100, 50, or fewer. Finally, I decided to select the 25 that most influenced me. I think each individual will have his or her own list.

**Q:** What do you think this book aims to achieve, and what is its added value?

**A:** The book will aid the modern reader in realizing how modern thinking in management and leadership has its foundation in thinking as far back as Aristotle's time. Even though not all of these thinkers were right, they laid the groundwork for today's thinking. In terms of the value added, some who have reviewed the book have told me it inspires them to create a list of the thought leaders who have shaped their thinking.



Available for purchase on Amazon.com

# CRISIS LEADERSHIP

by *Deirdre Dixon, Ph.D., adjunct professor of leadership*

**C**risis leadership is upon us: Now more than at any other period of history. Leadership during times of crisis is difficult and fraught with danger because crisis situations usually have high stakes and provide little time with which to deal with them. As our world changes and condenses, events of critical proportions are happening with more regularity: Hurricane Katrina, Super Storm Sandy, and the tsunami in Japan with its resulting nuclear clean up. Besides natural disasters, our world faces other emergencies, including deadly viruses and bacteria such as E-coli and the Ebola outbreak in Africa. Add to this list random violence, shootings, terrorist attacks and so-called "simple negligence," which results in disasters like the BP oil spill or massive product recalls, and it becomes clear that people today are affected by crises on a level that those years ago were not. Even on a personal level, everyone experiences family medical emergencies, caring for aging parents, or dealing with the special needs of friends or family members.



Deirdre Dixon, Ph.D.

People in a state of crisis are cast outside their comfort zones but must still make important life or death decisions. I spent over 20 years in the Army and, during my time there, including combat in Iraq, I learned that identifying key components of good decision making helps people to make better decisions in crisis situations. This realization led me to research this concept when I returned to school at Case Western Reserve University to obtain my Ph.D. in management.

My research covers in extremis leaders – leaders whose lives are also in danger. The occupations I study include firefighting, law enforcement and the military. Although this group represents a specialized set of professions, the lessons I have learned have applications for anyone facing a crisis situation. My main findings show that people who have mental flexibility, a sense of duty, and self-confidence are more able to accurately assess the situation and to make a difference in the outcome.

### **Mental Flexibility**

Mental flexibility embodies the willingness and ability to think of and to consider solutions not readily apparent or even comfortable. A certain amount of mental flexibility allows a person to "think outside the box," but too much can paralyze, leaving him unable to make a decision. In order for it to prove useful, one must combine mental flexibility with a strong and clear "sense of duty," which allows her to prioritize choices.

### **Sense of Duty**

We all deal with competing priorities on a daily basis. Ordering priorities in a crisis and correctly identifying duties are crucial for decision-makers. A business example exists in the recent struggles of automaker GMC. Caught up in a third recall of vehicles with safety

issues – and having been reluctant to issue recalls in the past - GMC has now appointed a "Global Safety Chief," whose job it is to put the safety of the consumer above company profits. Time will tell how fully this position and its underlying principles will influence the company's overall decisions, but at least a clearer prioritization of leadership goals seems to be emerging.

### **Self-Confidence**

Finally, I studied the issue of self-confidence. Like mental flexibility, self-confidence must be combined with another quality, self-sacrifice. A leader's ability to control fear or to exude calmness can certainly aid decision-making, but a leader must also put himself on the line. My experience in Iraq illustrated this fact quite clearly. My unit of 219 people and 63 vehicles was required to traverse a minefield that was marked on the periphery but not marked inside. Instead of ordering a junior soldier to lead the convoy, I went first. Although I felt fear, the only way through this figurative minefield of decisions was to lead confidently while also assuming the risks I asked of others.

Although my research explores dangerous occupations, the leadership lessons learned can be extrapolated to leaders in other organizations. Today's turbulent society makes it prudent for leaders to be ready for any situation. Leaders who have mental flexibility, a strong sense of duty and self-confidence tempered with willingness to sacrifice will have a head start in assessing the situation and responding in a positive manner.

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