

# Lessons in Leadership

Author Chris Lowney Discusses the Guiding Principles of Jesuits and How They Can Guide Leaders in Any Realm

Former Jesuit and JPMorgan executive Chris Lowney is the author of *Heroic Leadership: Best Practices From A 450-Year-Old Company That Changed The World*.

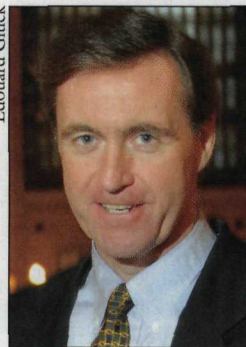
**HP: Your experience with the Jesuits has had a lot to do with how you understand leadership. Can you talk about that?**

**Lowney:** I was a Jesuit seminarian for six years after I graduated high school. Then, I worked at JPMorgan for 17 years, and was fortunate enough to have jobs in Tokyo, Singapore, London and New York City during that time.

You work in one of these big companies, and about every month, someone hands you one of these books on management or leadership. Some of them are wonderful; but many of them, frankly, are utter nonsense — shallow. And it used to strike me there was a lot more substance — leadership substance — in the Jesuit formation I received than in the books written by these so-called leadership gurus. So, I thought it might be interesting to explore leadership through the “prism” of a “company” like the Jesuits.

There’s a broader point at work. On the one hand, I’m proud of many wonderful management techniques and practices that the U.S. business culture has developed and disseminated throughout the world. But, on the other hand, I think we have this subtly evolving and very unhelpful trend whereby business — and especially U.S. business — is the “institution” that is best qualified to talk about how to manage and lead organizations well. That’s ridiculous. Anyone who has worked in one of these places knows that, though we do many things very well, we also have plenty of issues that we haven’t been able to resolve. So, just as I’ve tried to do in my book by suggesting what we all might learn from Jesuits, I’m interested in getting many other voices into the game concerning how to lead and manage successful enterprises. There are plenty of things that Catholic health care institutions can learn from great companies like JPMorgan. But, I also think that the JPMorgans of the world can learn plenty of things from Catholic health care, or, for example, from the traditions and practices of some of the sponsoring congregations, from other not-for-profit institutions and so on. My bottom line: let’s be humble enough, imaginative enough, and passionate enough about excellence that we

Edouard Gluck



Lowney

want to learn great ideas wherever we can find them.

**HP: What characteristics make up a great leader?**

**Lowney:** In the book I talk about four ideas: self-awareness, ingenuity, heroism and love. To lead well, you have to know yourself — your strengths and weaknesses, your values, your outlook on the world. Ingenuity: the world is going to keep changing, and only folks who

are willing to adapt to change are leading well. Third is heroism that we motivate ourselves and other people by real ambition, and a passion to excel, and with goals that are bigger than any one person. And finally love: that we treat other people in ways that respects their human dignity and tries to unlock their potential.

**HP: Have you known any such leaders?**

**Lowney:** Well, yes and no. I can’t say any one person leaps to my mind as “the exemplar” of this kind of leadership — certainly not me personally! But, to my mind at least, that’s a good thing that I can’t find a complete role model, because it leads to what is ultimately a more powerful way to think about leadership. Our culture nowadays is stuck with a lot of unhelpful stereotypes that associate leadership only with “being in charge.” So, a leader is the president or chief executive — the rest of us are something lesser than that — in that stereotype. Leadership is a sort of “destination” or plateau: when you get the big role, you’re a leader by virtue of that fact. It leads to the “guru-ization” of leadership, where leadership comes to mean “one great man” leads the rest and, inevitably, we get saddled with these kinds of grandiose-ego leaders, and then they all later feel compelled to write a book sharing their leadership secrets with the rest of us. No thank you.

But the four leadership qualities I mentioned earlier lead to very different assumptions about leadership. For example, they have nothing at all to do with status. We can all be self-aware or loving, for example, no matter what our role in the bank or in the hospital. So, therefore, we all have leadership

**Chris Lowney**

Chris Lowney was named a managing director of JPMorgan in his 30s and held senior positions in New York, Tokyo, Singapore and London until leaving the firm in

2001. He served on Morgan's Asia-Pacific, European and Investment Banking Management Committees, accumulating a wealth of multinational experience at a company regularly listed as one of "America's Most Admired Companies" by *Fortune* magazine.

Prior, Lowney was a Jesuit seminarian for seven years. During that time, he taught and studied at Jesuit institutions

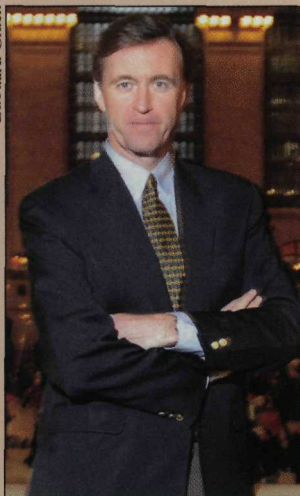
in the United States and Puerto Rico. He is a summa cum laude graduate of Fordham University in Bronx, N.Y., where he also received his master's degree and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. He is holder of honorary doctoral degrees from Marymount Manhattan College in New York City, Saint Louis University, and the University of Great Falls (Mont.).

He lives in New York, where he previously served part-time as special assistant to the President of the Catholic Medical Mission Board, a leading U.S.-based Catholic charity providing health care programs and services to people in need around the world. He traveled to Kenya, South Africa, Zambia and India to help launch the organization's major initiatives targeted at preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS.

His first book, *Heroic Leadership: Best Practices From A 450-Year-Old Company That Changed The World* (Loyola Press, 2003) was the No. 1 ranked bestseller of the Association of Catholic Booksellers and was named a finalist for a 2003 Book of the Year Award from *ForeWord Magazine*. The book is available in paperback after numerous hardcover printings, and has already been translated into several foreign languages. Lowney is a speaker on topics as varied as leadership, business ethics, and inter-religious dialogue, and has conducted lectures or seminars in many U.S. cities and countries across the globe, including the Philippines, Mexico, Venezuela, Spain and Indonesia.

His second book, *A Vanished World: Medieval Spain's Golden Age of Enlightenment* (Free Press, 2005) was nominated for the 2005 Quill Award and for La Coronica award. In a starred review, *Publishers Weekly* said, "This bold and compassionate articulation of medieval Spanish history, with its complex interactions among Jews, Muslims and Christians, speaks directly to contemporary international crises.... This engrossing and illuminating book deserves the attention of a wide public."

Edouard Gluck



opportunity and responsibility in our lives and in our work. And, leadership, when thought about this way, becomes a never-completed growth opportunity: it's not like we arrive at becoming "ingenious" or "loving" in the way we "arrive" as CEO. Rather, each new day brings challenges and opportunities for us to reflect and grow in those leadership values.

It's a much more invigorating way to think about leadership and, very importantly, it also helps us solve one of the dilemmas we have in promoting leadership throughout our organizations. That is, the top management of every large for-profit or charitable enterprise knows that leadership is needed at all levels of the organization. But, we often don't have good ways to communicate what we mean by that, because we have only these hierarchical models of leadership in our heads. So, I've focused on a very different kind of language relevant to people at all levels of an organization so that when we tell them we need more leadership from them, we can help them imagine some of the behaviors we mean by that.

**HP: What makes a leader heroic?**

**Lowney:** I used the word "heroic" in a provocative way in the book. The stereotype of a hero is often someone famous or someone who has done something earth-shattering. But we can rarely control the opportunities that life will bring us; we don't know if we will have the opportunity for some earth-shattering act of heroism. Most of us, administrators or as parents, earn our heroism not in one spectacular moment, but in the course of a lifetime of coming to work and living and working as if we might make a difference by what we do. That consistency of motivated effort and dedication is, over the long run, *heroic*. A lot of us, for example, would consider our parents to be heroes. I think that's partially because of their lifelong dedication, as I just described.

Of course, in the case of our parents, we also call them heroes because, "it wasn't about them." To use the vernacular, they "got over themselves" and were willing to dedicate themselves to a cause greater than self — in their case that of raising their children. So, this is another quality of heroism — the idea of dedication to a cause beyond one's ego. It's one that Catholic health care institutions must have wonderful opportunities to embody every day — I've never worked in a hospital, but even I know that a hospital succeeds only when everyone who works there "gets over him or herself" and buys into some greater mission that manifests itself in teams of people serving their patients rather than their egos.

**HP: What do you like to tell those who are new to their leadership role? What are the most common mistakes that keep leaders from attaining their full potential?**

**Lowney:** Well, since you ask it that way, I'm not going to answer by paraphrasing something in my book. Let me talk instead about two kinds of experiences or ideas that I actually used to discuss with people who worked for me at JPMorgan.

First, most new managers, including me, have the assumption — which seems completely natural — that you will, well, "be in charge" when you are the manager. That is, you will tell subordinates what to do and they will go off and do it. Then, when you get your first chance to manage, you realize that reality is rather more complicated than that. Maybe in the

1950s managers told people what they did and they went off and did it; the world sure isn't like that now. But, even people who have read all kinds of books about management and leadership still cling to this dream that they will "be in charge." So, inevitably, new managers would show up in my office all frustrated about a month after beginning their first managerial post, because the task of motivating people to get a certain result is more involved than just telling people to do something. To be sure, sometimes the world does work in that stereotypical way, especially in times of urgency or crisis. But, for the most part, the old "command and control" style of leadership simply doesn't work — people want to be involved, they want to know why we are going to do something, they want to understand the bigger picture, and they want to be able to share their own ideas about how to do things. So, one challenge — one advice — was to help new managers get over their "command and control" instinct and transition into a different style of working with subordinates — yet still getting real bottom-line results.

Another thing I often discussed with new managers is that, most of the time, subordinates know you are human and want to see you succeed. A lot of times, new managers assume the opposite. They feel they have to be perceived as knowing everything, as having all the answers, and so on. It ends up leading them into a very defensive, uptight, and fake way of working. Instead, people are most effective when they are natural — we all like natural people, and I think people respond best to leaders who present themselves as real people. So, a second area where I tried to encourage new managers was to be "natural," rather than affecting a worried, defensive, artificial posture of leadership. We used to have a great practice at JPMorgan where a manager, when he or she took over a new team, would have a meeting with that team that followed certain more or less scripted questions/discussion points. And one of the discussion points was something like: "I (manager) want to be successful, and I want you (team) to be successful, so let's spend some time discussing how we can help make each other successful." That kind of discussion can open up a very real and natural way of relating between a manager and team.

**HP: In order to promote a sense of mission and ministry in leaders' work, formation programs are a big deal in Catholic health care. What are the critical elements in effective leadership formation?**

**Lowney:** That's a great question, and if I had the answer, I could make a lot of money. I think I have *half* of the answer. One part of leading well is what we might call the "head part": you mention in the question, "promoting a sense of mission," and I translate that idea into more day-to-day language. A leader has to be able to understand, figure out, and convey to people the following: "this is where we are,

**Leadership also has what we might call a "heart part." In other words, it's one thing to tell me where we need to go; it's quite another to make me feel like you actually believe it, that you're not fake, that you have the courage to take risks now and then, that you are personally committed to the goal.**

and this is where I think we need to go, and here are some ideas for how we can get from here to there." That's the head part, that's promoting a sense of mission or purpose, and we can help people to develop the habits that will help them master this part of leadership.

But here's the part that is harder, and I don't know any patented way of making it happen. Leadership also has what we might call a "heart part." In other words, it's one thing to tell me where we need to go; it's quite another to make me feel like you actually believe it, that you're not fake, that you have the courage to take risks now and then, that you are personally committed to the goal. So, when I say "heart," I'm thinking of that whole bundle of words like authenticity, courage, commitment and so on. And we don't have any sure fire ways of giving people heart. It's a deeply spiritual thing. We look inside ourselves. We look at our deepest beliefs (religious or otherwise), and, in many cases, whether through their upbringing, or schooling, or some kind of "conversion experience," some people become deeply committed to and inspired by their beliefs. That's a mysterious thing. In companies like JPMorgan, we didn't even want to "go there," so to speak, for all kinds of reasons — fear of religious ideas in the workplace, fears that "spirituality" is too squishy a word for the bare-knuckled brawling world of investment banking, and so on. Maybe you have a real advantage in a Catholic health care setting: it gives you the freedom to invite people to confront themselves and their beliefs in a deeply spiritual way in order to find the "heart" to be good leaders. ■

*Learn more about Chris Lowney by visiting his website, [www.chrislowney.com](http://www.chrislowney.com).*



Comment on this interview at [www.chausa.org/hp](http://www.chausa.org/hp).