

Praise for *The Nine Types of Leader*

This is a very well researched and uniquely observed encyclopaedia of leaders and leadership. A must-read for all current and aspiring leaders. DAME CILLA SNOWBALL, WELLCOME TRUST GOVERNOR, GREAT PRIVATE SECTOR COUNCIL CHAIR AND FORMER GROUP CEO AND GROUP CHAIRMAN OF AMV BBDO

Every successful business is the result of successful leadership. However, there are wildly different types of leaders, with different strategies. Different markets, organizational cultures and industries require different leadership. And your own abilities and style determine your own leadership. James Ashton has produced a fresh, thoughtful, modern look at business leadership that will provide key insight to leaderships everywhere. REID HOFFMAN, LINKEDIN CO-FOUNDER, AUTHOR OF *BLITZSCALING* AND HOST OF *MASTERS OF SCALE* PODCAST

I've always said life is 50 per cent luck and 50 per cent what you do with it. James Ashton's *The Nine Types of Leader* captures the luck and actions of CEOs around the world, and then turns it into an opportunity for you to look at what you've been given and use it to shape the leader you will become. AJAY BANGA, MASTERCARD EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN

From interviews with a who's who of global business glitterati, James Ashton's new breakdown of nine types of leader is purposeful, authentic and delivered with his trademark readability. STEVIE SPRING, CHAIRMAN OF THE BRITISH COUNCIL AND THE MENTAL HEALTH CHARITY MIND

James Ashton has managed to produce a book about leadership that stands out in a busy field and cuts through management waffle. Pin-sharp analysis of the different types of leader, insightful commentary about the many leadership personalities he has interviewed over the years and vivid storytelling. As you read, you can't help but think about the type of leader you are

yourself (and secretly hope it's the Human one). A great read – thoroughly enjoyed it. RITA CLIFTON, CBE, PORTFOLIO CHAIR, NON-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND AUTHOR OF *LOVE YOUR IMPOSTER*

Business leaders are peculiar and brave. Few aspire to it; even fewer succeed. James Ashton has shrewdly tabulated his own butterfly collection of this exotic breed. Long on narrative, short on jargon and very entertaining. SIR PETER BAZALGETTE, ITV CHAIRMAN AND FORMER CHAIR OF ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

James Ashton has a knack for unpicking how leaders' motivations and methods develop over many years. This book neatly compiles a range of different approaches and suggests where leadership goes next as modern corporations and stakeholder demands evolve. GAVIN PATTERSON, SALESFORCE PRESIDENT AND CHIEF REVENUE OFFICER AND FORMER CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF BT GROUP

The world needs more great leaders, and James Ashton's thoughtful taxonomy points the way towards better leadership. Career-minded executives should pick it up. DAMBISA MOYO, GLOBAL ECONOMIST, AUTHOR, 3M AND CHEVRON BOARD DIRECTOR AND FORMER BOARD DIRECTOR OF BARRICK GOLD AND BARCLAYS

Packed full of fascinating real-world examples of the leaders that James Ashton has spent years researching and interviewing, this entertaining book shows how the different personality traits of leadership can play out in the human beings running some of our biggest businesses. CHRIS HIRST, HAVAS CREATIVE GLOBAL NETWORK CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND AUTHOR OF *NO BULLSH*T LEADERSHIP*

A very readable book about the types of modern business leadership, sprinkled with great personal anecdotes and inside stories. If you only buy one book on leadership this year, make it this one! BRIAN MCBRIDE, TRAINLINE CHAIRMAN, STANDARD LIFE ABERDEEN, WIGGLE AND KINNEVIK NON-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FORMER CHAIRMAN OF ASOS AND FORMER CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF AMAZON.CO.UK

A timely book – definitely one for the Davos crowd. SARAH SANDS, FORMER BBC RADIO 4 TODAY PROGRAMME EDITOR AND FORMER *EVENING STANDARD* EDITOR

The Nine Types of Leader

*How the leaders of tomorrow can learn
from the leaders of today*

James Ashton



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*To Viveka and Alice, my greatest supporters,
and to Oscar, who is always with us.*

Contents

Prologue xi

Acknowledgements xix

Introduction 1

1 Alphas 17

Empire builders 17

Scaling the heights 20

Rise and fall 28

The long view 29

Wounded beasts 31

Out of fashion 33

Banking on a big name 36

Technology titans 39

Endnotes 44

2 Fixers 46

Special delivery 46

No popularity contest 53

Keeping it simple 55

Fixed for now 62

Better to travel 64

Endnotes 68

- 3 Sellers 70
 - The consumer drug 70
 - The medicine man 73
 - The Proctoid takeover 76
 - Learning to sell 80
 - More than a marketer 86
 - Selling up 91
 - Endnotes 94

- 4 Founders 96
 - Being the brand 96
 - Humble and hopeful 100
 - The next challenge 103
 - Sleepless nights 105
 - The American dream 110
 - Letting go 112
 - Strong foundations 115
 - Endnotes 118

- 5 Scions 121
 - Prove yourself 121
 - Betting on the bloodline 124
 - The handover 127
 - Banking on succession 128
 - The glint of ambition 133
 - Managing risk 139
 - Trading up 140
 - Poured away 144
 - Privilege and nepotism 145
 - Endnotes 147

- 6 Lovers 149
 - Let's get physical 149
 - Advertising passion 154
 - Book lover 155
 - Strike oil 161
 - Strike gold 164
 - Giving more 167
 - Tough love too 168
 - Endnotes 170

- 7 Campaigners 172
 - Making business pay 172
 - Feed the world 180
 - Credible campaigning 187
 - Fast feet 189
 - Sense of mission 194
 - Conclusion 198
 - Endnotes 201

- 8 Diplomats 204
 - A vocal majority 204
 - White-collar armies 210
 - A key speech 217
 - Getting chosen 219
 - Checkout time 221
 - Head of the flotilla 224
 - Conclusion 226
 - Endnotes 227

9	Humans	231
	A green dream	231
	Taking a sledgehammer	236
	Finding freedom	238
	Learning from others	240
	Less is more	241
	Forever embedded	245
	One direction	248
	Conclusion	249
	Endnotes	251
	<i>Epilogue</i>	253
	<i>Index</i>	257

Prologue

When I set out to write this book, I was determined not to produce another academic study of leadership. Much ink has been spilt on plenty of those, written by greater minds than mine. And besides, rather than combing through balance sheets or charts or board papers or decades of management theory to come up with something new and inspiring, my primary source material is – largely – all my own work.

Over more than 20 years of journalism I have accrued hours and hours in the company of chief executives. Sometimes fleetingly, for the best part of an hour across a boardroom table, in a recording studio or on a conference stage; sometimes socially too, getting to know them gradually over a long period at parties, breakfasts and dinners that oil corporate life in London and beyond. I hope it adds up to a detailed understanding of what makes the boss class tick, their ambitions and fears, how they got where they are – and how they stay there.

In journalism, the power lies in opinion. It is why the populist Fox News thrived in the United States even before the Trump era and the divisive topic of Brexit left the BBC somewhat tongue-tied in its pursuit of editorial balance. Newspapers are viewpapers in which columnists hold sway, purveying thought-provoking, sometimes pungent views from beneath statesmanlike picture bylines. I like writing those too but must admit I have always loved conducting interviews, where the subject must obviously be the star and granted sufficient oxygen to speak.

Very early on in my career I remember journeying up to glamour-free Luton to the north of London to interview Sir Stelios Haji-Ioannou, his workspace a tiny perch at the end of a table in an aircraft hangar from where he master-minded the European expansion of the budget airline easyJet and was now turning his attention to other ventures. Another formative encounter was with Howard Schultz, the Starbucks tycoon, soon after he acquired the Seattle Coffee Company that gave the chain a bridgehead into the UK. Schultz appeared captive that day in a large armchair at the back of one of his coffee outlets as a production line of journalists processed past. It got me thinking about the nature of business, what drives the leaders behind these brands, and why they wanted to tell me about it.

Sports journalists have their star strikers and Olympic athletes, political writers obsess over the activities of ministers, senators, heads of state and the ideas of policy wonks. For me it has always been a fascination with chief executives, those leaders of giant workforces – often larger than a stadium full of fans or a country’s population – that generate great wealth, steward famous brand names or vital causes.

I soon understood my role. If I didn’t ask the question I wanted answering then nobody would. At the age of 18, in a late-night interview conducted for my local hospital radio station in West Yorkshire, I still regret not having the bravado to ask the comedian Sir Ken Dodd about his tax affairs when I had the chance. More bite was needed – and more preparation. Several years later, I resolved never to show up as unready as a journalist with whom I shared a slot for a joint interview – itself a disastrous format. His opening gambit to the chief executive across the table

was: ‘So, what do you do?’, which is the sort of small talk entrée you might expect the British royal family to trot out.

The joy of an interview comes in three stages. There is the before: pulling apart a beautifully botoxed CV, plump with superlatives and vaunting achievement that, together with a read-around and a ring-around, acts as a useful guide to where the real story lies. There is the after: crafting 1,300 or so words that sum up the subject, with some emphasis on finding a colourful three-paragraph drop intro to entice readers in. It is the meat in the sandwich I enjoy most: part conversation, part joust. The sights, the sounds, the figuring out: where am I, who is this person, why do they deserve to feature in my publication?

Efforts to sanitize the modern press interview have made great progress. These summit meetings are conceived to take place in bland rooms with heavily supervised chief executives offering up bland answers decorated with management speak, acronyms and key messages. And yes, sometimes they are so predictable that some write-ups could be produced before actual contact is made. The journalist is left to feel complicit in a set piece, a carefully choreographed decoration of an illustrious executive career.

But only sometimes. The barricades erected by corporate imagemakers are an invitation to delve deeper and press harder, to ditch the bland in favour of the chinks of light shone on a leader’s motivations and upbringing. Rather than a narrow prism, an interview properly handled is an opportunity to discover plenty about an individual’s accumulated experience, through their answers but also through their body language, the location, even the time of day. The bosses who gamely turned up at my office wanted

to be helpful or needed a favour; the leader who reluctantly assented to a chat during a noisy awards dinner that sent my Dictaphone into overdrive clearly didn't give a damn. Only once have I had to call back for a follow-up chat when I realized too late that a leader had beaten me. As it stood, he was just too boring to commit to print.

Many chief executives opt not to put themselves through the ordeal. For some, media relations activity is all risk, no reward. How presumptuous to be plastered across a full page, adorned with a portrait photo. How fatuous to contribute to a sidebar detailing their favourite movie, particular family relationships, leisure pursuits and what they had for breakfast.

Such a mindset suggests that the interviews I have collected must put across a lop-sided view of leadership. Rather than a broad spread of bosses, here is a subset of the most talkative, egotistical or pliant.

Certainly, media exposure is no corollary of success. Some terrible chief executives talk themselves up in the hope of polishing their legacy, while many good ones choose to say nothing. 'It's not about me, I'm just part of the team,' is a familiar but specious excuse for not finding the time in their hectic diary to engage.

Of course, those leaders that play the game want to push their cause. They might also want to correct misapprehensions, project a particular image, contribute to the national conversation or – as I have often found to be the case even in these ultra-cautious times – agree to be interviewed simply because they have been asked.

Rather than being out-and-out self-promoters – although some surely are – these are the enlightened ranks of the

boss class. They understand that communication is a key part of leadership, whether running a tiny, low-profile widget maker or a world-famous corporation like Coca-Cola. Giving an interview is to offer out the chance to have your performance, personality and leadership style scrutinized. The three are inextricably linked.

Such scrutiny can be done at a distance by studying the familiar corporate metrics – underlying earnings, return on equity, total shareholder return, carbon footprint, customer and staff satisfaction – or gathering views from shareholders and former colleagues. City analysts, academics and historians cover much of this territory. Similarly, chief executives can transmit their thoughts directly to staff or the wider world via social media or company intranet without the risk of being misinterpreted.

But that route fails to recognize what a rigorous media still offers. At a time when authenticity is perhaps the most prized leadership attribute, here is a credibility filter that rewards success, combats mistrust, highlights challenges and shows up fakers and failures, often in their own words. That drive for keeping it real could be why up-close, unstructured, sometimes unguarded media such as podcasting is riding high. It is another test to be put through, like a job interview with no appointment at the end.

There are only nine types

After 400 such encounters from San Francisco to Stockholm and Singapore, in boardrooms, hotel lobbies, over breakfast, lunch and dinner and in planes, trains and automobiles, I

have found these interviews to be the perfect vantage point from which to identify and analyse the Nine Types of Leader.

I interviewed so many chief executives, chairmen and similar that I began to see patterns in the crowd wisdom. Not only in how leaders answered my questions – that was down to the cookie-cutter media training some of them had been given – but in their approach to business and life. I wanted to see if I could group them together like signs of the zodiac or the Happy Families card game. For some leaders it was obvious, but some had a blend of ability, style and background. Others changed and developed during their career.

For this book I have looked back and studied numerous interviews from the last 20 years and refreshed some with follow-up conversations. I conducted many more anew, wrote in further examples with similar backgrounds or patterns of behaviour, and borrowed excerpts from my leadership podcast. Also included are leaders of not-for-profit organizations who are rarely credited for facing many of the same challenges as their corporate cousins. The criterion for inclusion is gloriously subjective: I think their take on life and business fits one of my nine types. If a business leader has had a colourful career, all the better.

I am sometimes asked what my best interview has been so far. If I answer based on who the interviewee was, that might be Facebook's Sheryl Sandberg, Sir Richard Branson or Carl-Henric Svanberg just as he arrived as chairman of BP, one of the prime roles in UK business. If I judge based on what was said, I would go for Tesco's Dave Lewis, TED's Chris Anderson or the newspaper proprietor

Richard Desmond, bored and blunt before he alighted on his acquisition of UK broadcaster Channel 5.

But the purpose of this book is to assess who are the best leaders. It quickly became clear to me there are some excellent, inspirational bosses but equally there are some who do not deserve to have been put in positions of great power. A third category is those poorly matched to their roles.

For would-be leaders this book is a guide to help identify who you are and how you can improve performance. It assesses the strengths and weaknesses of each leadership type and where and when they are best deployed. And, as the world seeks to recover from the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic – the most acute test of leadership in living memory – it projects how future leaders can learn from what has gone before.

By the way, ‘What kind of leader are you?’ is a question guaranteed to evince a seat-squirming answer every time. The truth is leaders rarely like to put it into words for external consumption; sometimes they don’t know. And even if they do, their chosen approach to leadership is not necessarily how it comes over. Perhaps this book will help them answer better.

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