

**Patten, R. M. (2023).**  
***Intentional leadership: The Big 8 capabilities setting leaders  
apart.* University of Toronto Press.**  
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In today's rapidly changing world, effective leadership is not a matter of chance but the result of deliberate, intentional development of specific capabilities. In *Intentional Leadership: The Big 8 Capabilities Setting Leaders Apart*, Rose M. Patten argues that specific capabilities are what can set leaders apart. Considering how the global financial crisis of 2007-2008 and the COVID-19 pandemic affected leadership more broadly, leadership techniques and methods had to evolve during such emergencies. In responding to these societal shifts, this book plots a clear path for exploring whether and how leadership needs to adapt. *Intentional Leadership* is truly "...moving from command and control to connect and collaborate" (Patten, 2023, p. 87) as Patten draws on the work of Gladwell (2000) and Horchow (2009) to address the importance of connectivity in leadership. Patten engages the reader with accounts from different leaders ranging from CEOs to government officials to academics, leaving all readers to take away learnings relevant to their context.

*Intentional Leadership: The Big 8 Capabilities Setting Leaders Apart* was borne of the experience of Dr. Rose M. Patten, Order of Canada (OC), who boasts a career spanning more than 30 years with well-earned positions at BMO Financial Group, BMO Nesbitt Burns, Manulife, and Lloyds Bank Canada. Dr. Patten was the 34th Chancellor of the University of Toronto, the Executive in Residence, and an Adjunct Lecturer at the Rotman School of Management. Patten's journey through the fields of executive leadership and management has positioned her well to offer insights into the leadership realm.

At its core, *Intentional Leadership: The Big 8 Capabilities Setting Leaders Apart* is designed to chart a path for the reader to discover leadership in the 21st century—leadership characterized by a degree of change that has never been experienced before. Current journals such as *Leadership's* pages are rife with articles that ensure a nod to a humanistic approach (Gesang et al., 2024; Næss & Svendsen, 2024). Through the lens of the *Big 8 Capabilities*, Patten does not merely identify the qualities that separate great leaders from the rest but also provides guidance for those who seek to make a difference in their sphere of influence. Compassion and wisdom combine in this book to ensure the message is clear that while one person may have been blessed with innate leadership abilities, another can learn and continue to build on their leadership acumen throughout their lifetime.

The structure of this book consists of twenty-three chapters that are organized into four thematic sections. Following a quick preface that explains the book's evolution, the author's introduction grounds the discussion as one focused on leadership in today's world. Patten's book is accessible and allows readers to selectively navigate its four parts. Many may choose to jump directly to parts two and three to explore the Big 8 capabilities and guidance on their implementation.

Part one, entitled *Leadership Has Never Been Harder – The Changing Context Drives It* (Chapters

1-4), describes the modern leadership scene, emphasizing that good leadership can be achieved through experience if there is a consideration of leadership as “totally dynamic and not at all static” (p. 38). This idea is highlighted through what Patten refers to as “game changers”: increased stakeholder expectations that set forth the need for ethical leadership and transparency, the ever-changing workforce and workplace that require leaders to adapt to a diverse workforce, and the impact of short-lived strategies and digital dominance that emphasize the adaptability to digital fluency.

Jumping into what may feel like more familiar territory for readers is part two, *Long-Held Beliefs, Myths, and Habits – Challenges to Leaders' Success*. This section (Chapters 5-10) presents a chapter-by-chapter focus on how effective leadership is dynamic, responsive, and dependent on both hard and soft skills. Critiques of leaders who rely only on past success are featured, followed by an explanation of the need to adopt new leadership strategies that respond to new technologies and diverse demographics. The remaining chapters in this section are focused on key discussions regarding the significance of mentorship, self-reflection, strategic agility, and digital fluency. All these capabilities equip leaders to continuously evolve to stay competitive in a rapidly changing world. This section of *Intentional Leadership* is especially valuable, as the author not only provides the theories behind the said capabilities but also provides cases that illustrate how these capabilities manifest in real-world scenarios.

The heart of the book resides in part three, *The Big 8 Crystallizes – Setting Leaders Apart*, as it builds on the foundational concepts introduced in the earlier section, adding a focus on the application of each of the 8 capabilities in various leadership contexts. Each chapter within section three (Chapters 11-19) offers detailed insights into each capability, supported by examples and discussions that illustrate their application in real-world scenarios. Highlighted is personal adaptability, that calls for leaders to be able to remain flexible and adapting to new situations swiftly; strategic agility which puts more focus on adjusting to the changing market; self-renewal which calls for a continuous growth of the leader, certainty of character which is the general principle of being a person of integrity and developing empathy, a basic trait of leadership; contextual communications, which stress the importance of explaining why the organization is following a certain course; spirited collaboration, which emphasizes inclusive teamwork and welcoming diverse viewpoints; and the development of other leaders, a shift from maintaining only followers to developing leaders in the organization. This part of the book draws awareness to the realization that true leadership requires being innovative, quick adaptation, and never becoming complacent.

Finally, part four, *Leadership Starts with You – It Must Be Intentional*, focuses on the inward, explaining why feedback and deep reflection are critical. These last chapters of the book (Chapters 20-23) emphasize leaders' responsibility for their continuous growth and the development of future leaders, focusing on team-building strategies and selecting the right individuals to handle challenges. It advocates for diverse perspectives, adaptability to team dynamics, and mutual benefits in mentoring. It concludes with a call to action, encouraging leaders to apply the principles discussed, experiment with strategies, and improve through feedback and practical experiences.

Patten outlines the big questions that lead to the foundation of the Big 8, but perhaps none as poignant as “can we pinpoint the specific capabilities of leadership that will now be even more critical to success and more highly valued and sought?” (Patten, 2023, p. xiii). Patten offers a great deal of insight into leadership in the ever-evolving climate in which we now find ourselves. Three key points that are echoed throughout the book are the importance of intentionality in leadership, the ongoing development of specific capabilities of leaders, and the need for continuous self-improvement and adaptation to modern challenges. *Intentional Leadership* effectively emphasizes the need for adaptive and proactive leadership in the 21st century, which is marked by “increasing complexity, crisis, and social expectations” (Patten, 2023, p. 8). Patten's recognition of outdated models and the pressing need for paradigm shifts in leadership is a significant strength of the book. Elements of the proposed model for leading with intention, such as Personal Adaptability, Self-Renewal, and Self-Reflection, reflect Peter Senge's renowned concepts of Personal Mastery and Mental Models (Senge, 2006). These elements underscore the importance of continuous personal growth and the necessity for leaders to understand and proactively respond to a changing world. The book is commendable for the clarity of its arguments and its use of direct quotes from leaders, which helps ground theoretical concepts in real-world applications. This approach makes the material not only accessible and practical for current and aspiring leaders but also valuable for graduate students studying organizational leadership.

While *Intentional Leadership* covers many important aspects, it doesn't fully address the nuanced reconfigurations needed for 21st-century leadership compared to other works in the field. Patten's work addresses the need to adapt to changes such as digitalization and global crises; however, the book lacks a thorough exploration of how leaders can, through lifelong learning, effectively navigate and influence the broader social, political, and economic dynamics of the current era. The premise of moving from command and control towards collaboration and connectivity is not a new assertion and has been touted in various forms by those who have come before. Indeed, while the author asserts that "leadership is learned" (Patten, 2023, p. 7), echoing the organizational theories of Mintzberg (1993) and Bolman and Deal (2017) with the importance of human agency at the forefront, there is a lack of theoretical focus on learning compared to other authors who discuss leadership, such as Taylor (2011) and Senge (2006).

From a practitioner's perspective, concepts that resonate within Patten's work on *Intentional Leadership* are echoed and confirmed in the work of other leadership stalwarts, Simon Sinek and Brene Brown. In his 2019 work *The Infinite Game*, Simon Sinek discussed the concept of adopting an infinite mindset in leadership, similar to the necessary growth mindset needed according to Patten. Sinek (2019) argued that leaders should focus on long-term success and continuous improvement rather than short-term gains, in alignment with Patten's emphasis on self-renewal and strategic agility. In her ground-breaking work on vulnerability and leading with empathy, Brown (2018) offered the leadership world a similar structure to follow in research-based insights accompanied by practical advice in *Dare to Lead: Brave Work. Tough Conversations. Whole Hearts*.

Despite its strengths, the book does not address the importance of diversity in leadership roles or the implications of social justice in leadership practices, which are crucial in Canada's multicultural workplace. Furthermore, the book focuses exclusively on the leader as an individual, overlooking the collective and collaborative aspects of leadership, neglecting the relational dimension of leadership vital in contemporary organizational settings (Short, 1998). Although the book emphasizes adaptability and self-renewal, which equips leaders to navigate their organizations through social changes and innovations, it does not provide a comprehensive framework for addressing the complexities of intersectionality in leadership practices. This book reads as grounded in a Western and business-centric viewpoint, which may have contributed to its limited emphasis on fostering inclusive and equitable workplaces, as well as its comparatively lesser focus on promoting diversity among leaders.

*Intentional Leadership* has the potential to serve as a valuable supplementary resource in academic settings, particularly in courses focused on organizational leadership, ethics, and change management. Educators can utilize this book to introduce students to contemporary leadership challenges and the skills necessary to address them. For example, they could examine the application of the "Big 8" capabilities in specific sectors such as technology, healthcare, or education, analyzing how these capabilities influence leadership effectiveness in varying contexts. Additionally, it is crucial for students to consider the hidden actors or agendas of this book. This consideration could include how leaders can address the underrepresentation of women and other marginalized groups in prominent leadership roles. Moreover, students should explore who the decision-makers are who support the ascension of certain employees over others through promotion, mentoring, and networking.

*Intentional Leadership: The Big 8 Capabilities Setting Leaders Apart* holds value not only for academics, as highlighted above, but also for practitioners, as its practical applications may make it a particularly valuable resource. Through a practitioner's lens, the book provides a clear and actionable framework with eight specific leadership capabilities that are essential for thriving in today's complex environments. These capabilities are designed to be immediately applicable in real-world settings and are broken out in clear, digestible language. Patten's insights are drawn from extensive experience and interviews with over 900 senior leaders across various sectors, ensuring that the advice is grounded in practical, real-world contexts. The book effectively meets leaders at their current stage in their journey, providing actionable advice and real-world examples beneficial for immediate implementation and ongoing development. Finally, the emphasis on self-awareness, feedback, and continuous improvement makes the book a valuable tool for current leaders who are looking to enhance their effectiveness and adapt to changing conditions.

Overall, *Intentional Leadership: The Big 8 Capabilities Setting Leaders Apart* offers readers another frame through which they can enact a more sophisticated cultural approach to leadership. By breaking concepts down in this way, Patten advances understanding of leadership by emphasizing the

necessity for continuous adaptation and self-renewal amidst rapid change and complexity. Current and aspiring leaders can derive substantial practical benefits from its concepts, particularly through the “Big 8” capabilities framework. This framework encourages introspection and external impact assessment, fostering a well-rounded and dynamic leadership style. *Intentional Leadership* serves as a vital resource for leaders in business, non-profits, and other sectors, offering a robust framework for personal and professional growth in an ever-evolving landscape. We feel that *Intentional Leadership*'s strength lies in a full cover-to-cover reading to ensure a grounding in why these capabilities are essential and why they are relevant in today's world. Patten's approach is informed by significant research and analysis, making it a useful resource for academic studies on leadership theories and practices.

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