

Timeless Leadership - 18 Leadership Sutras from the Bhagavad Gita

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Debashis Chatterjee, *Timeless Leadership-18 Leadership Sutras from the Bhagavad Gita*. Wiley India Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi; Price: Rs. 385, Pages 234, ISBN: 978-81-265-3665-8

Author's Profile

Debashis Chatterjee has taught leadership classes at Harvard University and at Indian Institute of Management (IIM) in Kolkatta, Lucknow and Kozhikode for nearly two decades. The Author of six books including *Leading Consciously* and *Break free*, Dr. Chatterjee has trained more than 10000 managers globally and has served as leadership coach to political leaders and CEOs of Major Indian organizations. Dr. Chatterjee is currently the Director of IIM Kozhikode.

Review

Exploring some of the greatest questions in human history – from the meaning of life to the nature of consciousness – the Bhagavad Gita has been a source of guidance for millions of readers around the world for over 2000 years. *Timeless leadership - 18 leadership sutras from Bhagavad Gita* brings the ageless lessons of this revered Hindu Spiritual text to an entirely new audience – today's business leaders.

The 18 business sutras of Bhagavad Gita have deep philosophical as well as practical implications for leaders of the third millennium. Krishna literally guides Arjuna through ABC's of leadership. Here A represents Authenticity or truth which is the core value of leaders; B stands for Being which is the raw material for becoming a leader and C for Convergence which a leader achieves between his current reality and his goal or between a problem and solution.

Following are the 18 leadership sutras

Sutra 1 narrates that Leaders of the future have to negotiate not only urgent but also the emergent - that which is not yet obvious. All wars are fought in the mind. Conflict arises when a mind is reluctant to get out of its entrenchment in a familiar way of life. At any point of time thoughts swarm across the mental space like bustling crowds in a metropolis. When the mind behaves like an unruly mob it loses its power to act wisely. The body follows through non action.

Sutra 2 tells us about Wisdom. Leaders create alternative reality. It means leaders always bring a refreshing perspective that reframes current reality. Leader's inspiration comes from unselfish work which leads to evenness of mind. Only such leaders can harness the power of intellect. Timeless leaders know the difference between knowledge and wisdom.

Sutra 3 conveys about Karma Yoga. Krishna narrates three different faces of work, action inaction and effortless action. All of us come into this world to make a contribution based on our capabilities. By diligently performing one's obligatory actions a leader moves to the next stage of evolution at work – stage of effortless action.

Sutra 4 The author writes about how timeless leaders pursue purpose as the source of supreme power. Leadership is not a nine to five affair. It is 24/7/365 work of a lifetime. It is an evolving process that embraces the whole of life. A leader is like magnetism or gravity which works 24 hours a day without fail.

Sutra 5 speaks about leadership and the art of undoing. Leadership is associated with frantic action and dramatic results. What the leader has done tells us only half of the story, the other half consists of what the leader has undone. The most potent leaders of the world such as Gandhi or Martin Luther King Jr, were busy undoing the ignorance of past ways of life, in the form of violence entrenched in the mind or racial discrimination.

Sutra 6 This sutra highlights the fact that leaders are masters of their minds. Just as an expert learns to master his craft, leader learns to master his mind. Before he can command others, he has to know how to command his own mental forces. Krishna tells Arjuna that the only way to harness the mind is through practice and dispassion.

Sutra 7 deals with the concept that leaders are integrators. An integrated leader unites a diversity of people and

processes like a thread of a necklace that holds many pearls together. Very often one is asked, are leaders born or made? The answer is leaders can be made provided they are born with some inherent qualities of head and heart such as courage, intelligence, compassion and wisdom.

Sutra 8 deals with timeless leadership and decoding the meaning of life. Krishna tells Arjuna that meaning of life can be found only when we learn to explore the ultimate source of life and our work. One of the world's best companies to work in the field of medical equipment describes its rationale for the existence in few simple words, to restore people to their whole lives. This is the real work of timeless leaders, to restore people to the wholeness of their being.

Sutra 9 The real presence of a leader is often determined by his absence. A cube of ice is dropped into a glass of water. The ice gradually melts away, cooling the water. Here form of ice is lost it functions in absentia. Similarly a leader who understands the function of royal self is capable of leading even though he is absent in form.

Sutra 10 tells us about timeless leader who leads consciously. He brings the whole consciousness of who is, to what he does. True leaders apply the discipline of silence by learning to be observers. Observation is the art of seeing without judging, naming or measuring.

Sutra 11 In this sutra the author tells that Timeless leaders have integral vision. The art of seeing through mind's eye is often described as visionary leadership. One of the virtues of timeless leadership is the ability to recognize patterns based on inadequate or insufficient data points. India's ascent from a grossly poor country to one of economic powerhouse of the world occurred when some of the best entrepreneurs recognized the new pattern of thinking.

Sutra 12 This sutra deals with the proposition that leadership is love made visible. Bill Geroge former CEO of Medtronic, now a Harvard Professor who teaches a popular course called Authentic Leadership says to his class, you have a choice between seeking the worlds esteem and being grounded in your own intrinsic desire. It is very much true that one can be truly devoted to work on sustainable basis only when one can do so from the state of love.

Sutra 13 This sutra says timeless leaders have the ability to see the invisible. He has to acquire the eye of wisdom. This teaches him the capacity of discrimination. Thomas Watson Sr, the founder of IBM once said that no leader can escape supervision. A leader understands that every member including himself is subject to scrutiny. This brings about deeper sensitivity in the leader.

Sutra 14 This sutra emphasizes on Nature's work which is synthesis of inertia, dynamism and illumination. These three processes can be seen at work in both physical and psychological universe.

Sutra 15 This sutra describes the tree of life. It represents the diverse field of manifest as well as unmanifest in life. Krishna describes the phenomenon of life as interplay of matter, energy and mind.

Sutra 16 In this sutra author talks about toxic leadership. It means leader is incompetent, rigid, intemperate, callous, corrupt, insular and evil.

Sutra 17 Here the author talks about leaders and their faith. Faith is the deepest driving force that shapes human being's values and beliefs. It is faith that shapes one's destiny. The author has quoted examples of Yudhishtir and Duryodhana who had two different kinds of faiths. Youdhishtir lived by values of purity of speech and goodness. On the other hand Duryodhana was cunning and devilish at heart. Youdhishtir visualizes a world of good based on his faith. Duryodhana's faith in evil makes see him nothing but evil.

Sutra 18 In this sutra Krishna shows how the three paths of leadership- knowledge, action and devotion become one in pursuit of perfection. The journey of perfection is our evolutionary urge to transcend the limitations of our physical and mental condition.

Conclusion

The author explores practical wisdom for timeless leaders. A leader in today's workplace often finds himself stuck on information highway and unable to make headway. Here he writes about practice of handling information overload. Leaders must solve their most persistent problem. He also narrates about core capability of leaders. Leaders must possess ability to lead the change. In times of change business as usual no longer works. Leaders succeed by merging their individual with life's purpose. The human will is a subtle and powerful force. The willpower sustains greater life when it merges with the purpose of larger environment.