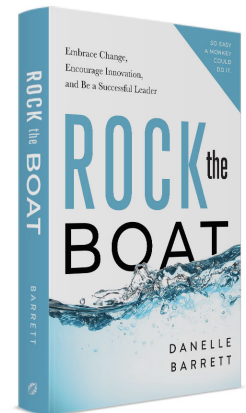


Rock the Boat

Embrace Change, Encourage Innovation,
and Be a Successful Leader

by **Danelle Barrett**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Being a leader is a calling above being just a manager. A leader must devote themselves to the people around them— understanding their wants, needs, motivations, skills, what they're capable of, and how to connect with them. In this way, leadership and mentorship go hand-in-hand.

In *Rock the Boat: Embrace Change, Encourage Innovation, and Be a Successful Leader*, Danelle Barrett shares everything she's learned about the intersection of leadership and mentorship and how leaders in all arenas can use these secrets to unlock the potential of their people. Whether you're looking to inspire more, achieve more, be a more effective mentor, or encourage better communication and collaboration in your organization, *Rock the Boat* has principles to transform you and your leadership for the better— and, in turn, transform your organization for the better.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to inspire the people around you, from teams and employees to mentees.
- How leadership and mentorship go hand in hand, and how to weave them together to great success.
- How to translate your leadership vision into reality with actionable steps.
- Communicate, connect, and collaborate better with the people around you— from subordinates to team members to superiors.

Introduction

Leadership, unlike management, is not science and numbers. It's about people. It is intrinsic and learned behaviors that people use to inspire others to follow and exceed expectations while achieving common objectives. Through innate ability and experience, everyone develops their own unique style as a leader. That style is heavily influenced by both the good and bad behaviors they have observed in other leaders over the years but remains unique to each individual. Those who stand out are able to translate their vision into reality by the way they communicate, connect, and collaborate with others to generate excitement about that vision and see their role in achieving it. A leader's courage, tenacity, and ability to not be deterred by cynics or obstacles motivate others to follow in their footsteps.

Leadership and mentorship are two sides of the same coin, and you have to be deliberate in your actions to do them well. They both require integrity, empathy, and the ability to inspire others. They require you to excite your team, your employees, and your mentees. You must genuinely connect with other people, clearly and frankly communicating what to expect, how you measure success, and that what you do means more than what you say. Above all, they both require you to not be a jerk. To that end, this book features both leadership and mentorship concepts, alternating between chapters with the intention of showing their interconnectedness and how the best leaders align their efforts in both areas effectively.

Lead Change

You can't think of something new if you're doing the same things as everyone else. Be open to new approaches and expect your people to think and act differently. If you mentor them on how to do that, they will. Don't get stuck on old processes or the way things are done. Think about—and have your people think about—what can be jettisoned. Start with new processes from a different angle. This is a completely different way to look at the problem and offers more opportunity for truly transformational thinking and results.

Being truly transformational with technology requires agility to pivot at the next technology, speed to use it quickly, and focused attention to balance multiple efforts simultaneously. Only by embracing change, seeking out new ideas, and leading your team to always move forward can you create the future.

Why Mentoring Matters

A good mentor supports you and guides you on your path. They know when to listen and when to give advice. They are a good sounding board for ideas or can help you work through a tough leadership or ethical situation. They look for opportunities for you and support your advancement and professional progress with others. They don't give you the answers; they teach you to think through the problem to find the answer yourself. They talk to you about options you should consider in the calculus of the decision you will make and the possible consequences of choosing one of those options over another. In short, they lift you up and make your success as much of a priority as—or more than—their own. Having a good mentor can change your life personally and professionally.

Managing Expectations

Exceptional leaders set clear expectations and help others achieve those goals. They ensure that their teams understand their vision and objectives and what each person needs to contribute as part of the team to meet those high standards. To be a good leader, your expectations must reflect your values. Priorities will change, but your values will not. Establishing a high bar encourages people to reach beyond what they thought possible, and allowing for stumbles along the way shows them you understand that they may struggle in meeting those expectations and where you can jump in to help.

As a leader, you should be as clear as possible about your vision, desires, and expectations. You also need to be unambiguous when it comes to roles, responsibilities, and accountability. You can't have everyone in charge or no one in charge.

Frank Conversations

A mentor or a leader cannot provide the best advice if they don't know the full story, and a mentee cannot get the help they need without the same. In the context of rankness, the mentor and mentee have to acknowledge that they may have different communication styles that could impact their relationship. For the mentor-mentee relationship to thrive and survive, communication styles that tend toward circumspection or talking around the issue for fear of hurting someone's feelings won't work. Being blunt and direct may be out of a mentor or mentee's comfort zone—or both—but it will be necessary. As a mentor, you don't want the conversation to end up with your mentee leaving the discussion more upset, confused, or adrift than when it started.

No one relishes having a difficult conversation where they need to deliver bad news, provide an unpopular opinion, or recommend something that they know goes against what the person thinks should happen. Mentors and leaders owe it to those who are looking to them for advice to be honest and deliver information unemotionally, clearly, and in a timely manner. Bad news does not get better with time, so you owe it to the individual to initiate that tough conversation and make the message clear. Don't waffle.

Effective Communication

Effectively communicating their vision and desires to their organization and to those on the outside is one of the most important things a leader can do. Being able to articulate vision, challenges, successes, future plans, and current operations succinctly and in terms that people can understand sounds easy, but it takes time and effort to get it right. You need to have a deliberate strategic communications plan that identifies the theme or message you want relayed, the intended audience, the media to be used for information dissemination, the frequency of communications, and the methods of measuring efficacy of the messaging. You can codify your plan with these specifics and see it become a living, breathing document that gets revised for longer-term plans or used as a jumping-off point for similar short-term efforts.

Career Mapping

Passion is one of those terms that generally results in one of two competing reactions. On one hand, you're supposed to be passionate to show that you care about your work and that you're putting serious energy into it. But passion can also be pejorative, implying that you are blind to the reality of a topic or problem. It's often heard throughout the military for the author: "She is too passionate about this," or, "He gets too emotional about that; he is too close to the problem." But passion is an asset, as long as it goes hand in hand with being able to consider other perspectives objectively as well.

Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance will be as much of a priority as you make it. Allowing your team members time with their families or to take care of their health doesn't take away from productivity or efficiency; it increases it. A proper balance keeps your workforce from burning out, becoming despondent, and leaving. But make sure that your focus on balance is communicated through your actions. Words aren't enough. Many organizations have a mismatch between what they

say and what they do. In meetings and official communication, they'll tout their strong support of family and life outside work, then they'll expect their employees to be in the office very weekend or to miss their kid's recital. You've heard that actions speak louder than words, and this is a clear example: what you do means more than what you say.

Finding Inspiration

As a mentor, you can help your mentee find the inspiration to excel at what they are passionate about. That can come in many forms—from people, nature, physical objects, music, poetry, and art to acts of courage, grace, and selflessness. Get inspired by innovative, bold thinkers who see a future that others cannot. Walt Disney. Elon Musk. Whoever it is for you, who doesn't love someone who is transforming an entire industry. Then they make those visions into reality. Those are the people that can inspire us to our greatest potential.

Pick the Hill You Want to Die On

Sometimes leaders can't see the forest through the trees to properly prioritize so everything becomes a crisis that everyone in the organization tries to respond to. It's like watching 20 five-year-olds chase a soccer ball. In other instances, people feel like they can only act and react if they are in crisis mode, so everything gets prioritized in a crisis. Either way, it is a leadership and management fail.

Remember: life is short. You don't have to work for or with jerks. That is a choice, so choose not to, because there are enough people who won't act that way and will appreciate that you don't either. Be clear on your standards, then stick to them consistently, publicly, and with transparency in your communications and, more important, in your demonstrated actions.

Leadership and Mentoring in Times of Crisis

Your organization will experience a crisis at some point. It may be temporary, or it could be existential. Either way, the crisis is real, and how you respond sets the tone for how you will come out of the crisis at the other end.

If you have established a reputation as a person of courage, integrity, intelligence, empathy, good judgement, and transparency, then your employees will be with you from the start, supporting what you ask them to do. Those requests may be above and beyond what they have normally done; testing the status quo in challenging times is expected.

Fail with Grace

True leaders have their fair share of battle scars for screwing things up. You don't know what you don't know, so sometimes you just make the wrong choice, even with the best information, intentions, and support from your team or senior management. But there are very few mistakes that you cannot recover from with the right degree of humility, a proactive demonstration that you've learned from it, and confidence in yourself and your core values to right the wrong.

Don't let others cause you to doubt that last point. Your confidence and the confidence you instill in others with your integrity, reliability, transparency, steady hand, vision, and uncompromising standards will have people continuing to line up behind you, wanting to work with you, and continuing to support you even through failure or missteps.

Overcoming Your Own Biases

Mentoring is a multidimensional activity. It's important to be aware of factors that influence the mentor-mentee relationship. We all have biases and preconceived notions about the ways of the world. These notions are based on how we are raised, our values, religion, lifestyle preferences, careers, families, external cultural influences, and so on. We need to be reflective and aware of our potential biases, keeping them in check so we do not project them onto those we mentor and cloud good advice.

Guard Your Reputation as a Leader

As you advance and grow in your career, you will establish your reputation. The choices you make in each job form an aggregate that will both precede and follow you. Be aware

of how your actions are perceived by others so that you are comfortable with the reputation you establish. Others' opinions are formed by observing the way you lead and manage; how you align your words to your actions; how you treat subordinates, peers, and superiors; and how you make decisions, take risks, and innovate. Understanding how others see you enables you to better collaborate and ensure you're meeting the high standards they expect.

You Only Live Once

Don't shortchange your health—take it seriously. You only go around this rodeo once. By taking care of your health, you are sending an important message to those you lead and mentor that it matters. It also matters to those who depend on you, care about you, and want you to succeed. It sends the message that you care about yourself and your life outside the workplace as much as you do about the job. This opens the door for your employees and mentees to take care of themselves too.



As an admiral, Danelle Barrett served as Director of Current Operations at U.S. Cyber Command, and as the Navy Cyber Security Division Director and Deputy Chief Information Officer on the Chief of Naval Operations staff. An innovator, she implemented visionary digital transformation to modernize with unprecedented speed, significantly improving Navy Information Warfare capabilities. She currently executes a portfolio of work that includes being an Independent Director on several Corporate Boards, consulting, public speaking, and writing with over 36 articles published.

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