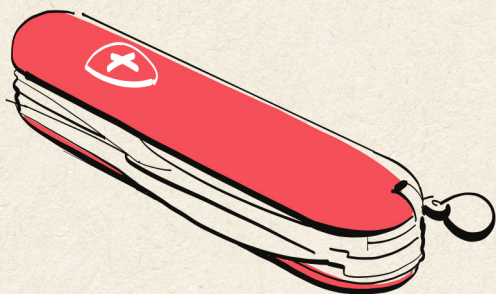


Gabriël Anthonio

THE SWISS ARMY KNIFE FOR LEADERS

A GUIDE TO LEADERSHIP
WITH LASTING IMPACT



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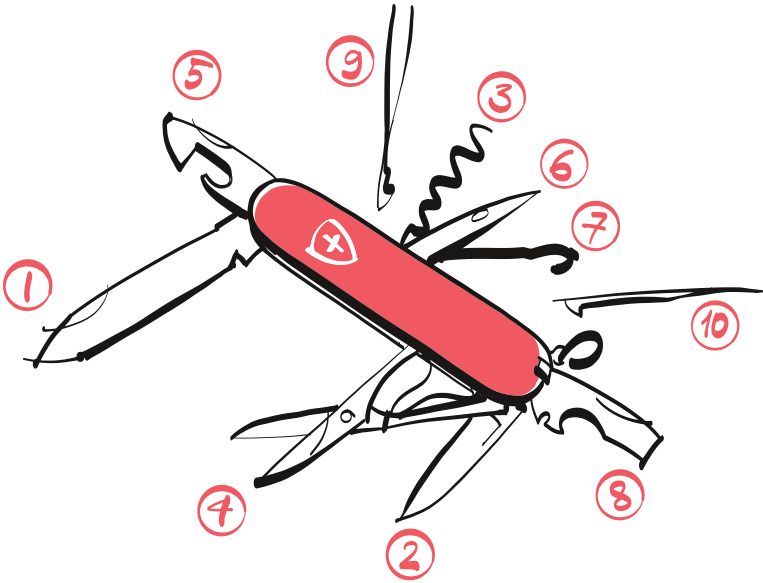
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This book will be your constant companion. You can pick it up anytime and, according to your needs, read its ten chapters separately. You can give this book to anyone you wish to encourage to develop leadership skills that have lasting, positive impact. This book speaks to the mind, but most of all, it speaks to the heart.

Foreword

During summer holidays I often stayed at my grandparents. One warm day, as we rested on a bench during a walk, my grandfather took out his pocket knife, as he often did. But that day, he did not use any of the knife's tools. He produced it to tell me about the significance of the knife itself. He placed it in the palm of his hand and gently described the meaning of the red pocket knife. This would be the start of a stream of stories and images that have profoundly shaped my thinking about my personal development and leadership.

“Look closely, son,” he said that day. “This is the Swiss Army knife I always carry with me. My father gave it to me when I was a child. It often came in handy for small jobs, sometimes for bigger jobs. During the war or whenever I was afraid, all I had to do was put my hand on it to regain my sense of calm. Time and again I realized that in any given situation multiple options were available to me. That thought helped me put trust in my own range of possibilities for overcoming difficult situations. I have noticed that any time I pulled out the pocket knife, you would look at it with great interest. You followed what I did and listened to my story intently. I could feel that in those moments something special was happening. I shared life lessons with you and you took them in. When I am no longer here, this knife will belong to you.”

Somehow, my grandfather's pocket knife got lost after his death. Perhaps it was always meant to. Now I had to take up my own knife. I imagined what my grandfather, who passed away in 1987, would say to me as he looked at this book and its stories – a book about the lessons on leadership he taught me as a child, using his Swiss Army knife.

“I have been away from you all for quite some time now,” I pictured him saying. “My earthly life is finished. I am glad to see the life lessons we shared will now be passed on to future generations through this book, because the future is theirs. It was a privilege to hold the door for that future in my humble roles as teacher, father, and grandfather. Look after your own Swiss Army knife, handle it with care. And yes, that unique pocket knife, as you know by now, is you.”

– Charles van Dijck (1904-1987)

Introduction

Do you want to dive into learning about leadership that has lasting impact, and become a more competent leader yourself? Then this book is for you. Using the tools of the Swiss Army knife – my grandfather's pocket knife – I offer suggestions to further develop your leadership skills.

Leadership, in a nutshell, is about consciously exercising influence; on yourself, on those near and dear to you, on your environment. Leadership is also about adding value. And it's about simplifying complex problems so that they can be grasped and dealt with as you achieve success. All of this begins with living and working from your core values.

The Swiss Army knife stands for your personal leadership – leadership where you learn to see that you always have multiple options, no matter how difficult a situation may be; that you can let go of routines and consciously choose another option. In short, you can abandon visions that no longer suit you and behavior that doesn't serve you, and replace them with things that do work. Leadership is an on-going process of falling and getting back up again.

The guide in this book is Charles van Dijck, my maternal grandfather. An inspiring and wise man, a leader whom I, as a child, looked up to. I will offer you various experiences we shared when I was young, oftentimes small events; times when my

grandfather took out the pocket knife. His interventions were small, but their impact was huge. To me, they became little life lessons and larger life lessons about relating differently and better to all kinds of situations.

As a child I was fascinated with the wine-colored knife. I could not wait for my grandfather to take it out. When a job was done, he cleaned his knife thoroughly, folded it, and carefully tucked it away. He treated the pocket knife with respect, used it purposefully and never forced it – exactly how a leader, in my view, should act.

My grandfather worked as a teacher and, later on, as the director of multiple schools. He never wrote out instructions, but demonstrated that exercising influence requires, first and foremost, taking a step back from impulsive reflexes and creating a space of calm to consider alternatives. While doing so, making mistakes is allowed. It is part of the learning process.

Ever since my childhood, the pocket knife has been a symbol of my personal development in leadership, with the purpose of continuously increasing impact. A symbol, in other words, for leadership that requires me to change myself first to learn new things, in order to create a lasting, positive influence on my environment.

The Swiss Army knife is an icon. A practical top-quality tool to help you in many situations. It is obvious why soldiers, adventurers, back-packers, techies, do-it-yourselfers, and design-lovers have been huge fans for well over a century. The first model dates back to 1890. It was intended for soldiers of the Swiss Army and had a blade, a punch, a can opener, and a screwdriver.

Because this pocket knife was coarse and heavy, the army command thought it unsuitable for officers, so a lighter version was developed, the now very well-known officer's knife, which came out in 1897. Gradually, more and more tools were added to the original knife. In the latest versions you will even find a light and a USB stick. Tradition and innovation seamlessly blending into one.

About this book

The Swiss Army knife comes in all shapes and sizes. Mine is a *Climber*, a pocket knife with ten tools: the large blade, the small blade, the corkscrew, the scissors, the hook, the can opener, the bottle opener, the punch, the tweezers, and the tooth pick. Each chapter of this book focuses on one of those applications. Guided by My Grandfather's lessons and using specific and practical examples from my own working environment, I will show you how to take out the metaphorical pocket knife any time you wish. Imagine placing it on the palm of your hand; now look carefully at the various options and then decide on the right tool for an appropriate intervention.

Of course, you can read this book from beginning to end, but it works just as well to start at any chapter. Each part of the knife is independent, and has its own power. Whichever way you read this book, allow yourself time to do so. Take notes of things that speak to you or that you would like to take further. See also the questions and exercises at the end of each chapter.

I offer guidance to get you thinking. Do not expect any grand and majestic stories or lists to follow, in order to be successful. Leadership sometimes takes on mythical proportions, making it seem unattainable for many. I have deliberately chosen to tell small, everyday anecdotes about leadership and influence. My

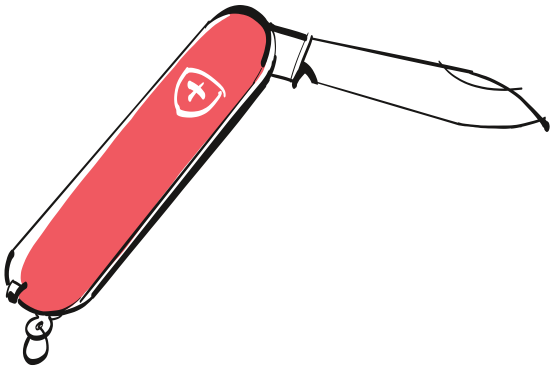
aim is to demythologize leadership and open it up to people in all kinds of roles and situations. Use this book in moments of doubt when you wonder how to proceed. You do not have to be in a crisis to start working on yourself. Whether you are in an exciting or quiet time in your life, leadership skills can always be improved.

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Leadership with impact takes place in the horizontal space, where the quality of your relationships is what makes the difference.”

1. THE LARGE BLADE

Major issues first. When firm and visible intervention is necessary to deal with a large-scale problem.



The large blade is razor-sharp. You can use it for firm interventions. Use the knife with a confident hand, no hesitation. The large blade is not designed for delicate procedures. Stay focused on the bigger picture; don't let yourself get distracted by details. First the large issues, and then the smaller ones! Big problems can stir up big emotions. They can push you in the wrong direction or rush you when there is no need. So don't work too hastily; when you cut too far or too deep, you may cause irreparable damage. Work carefully and make sure you don't work on your own, despite carrying a large weapon in your hand.

MY GRANDFATHER'S LESSONS

The difficult pupil

My grandfather was a teacher at a primary school. Quite often, "difficult" children were put in his class; boys and girls with behavioral problems. Gerrit was one of those boys. Several schools had already sent him away because of his aggression. My grandfather soon noticed that Gerrit had difficulty keeping up with the rest of the class. Frustrated and insecure, the boy lashed out physically and verbally. All of the other children were afraid of him.

Instead of punishing and reprimanding Gerrit, my grandfather made a proposal to the class. They needed a guardian, someone who was big and strong. The children nodded in agreement and looked at Gerrit. Then my grandfather appointed him "class guardian." Gerrit immediately accepted.

Gerrit was allowed to do all kinds of practical jobs, such as wiping the board and taking paper to the trash can. He was reg-

ularly allowed to borrow and use my grandfather's pocket knife. That was a true honor. He was also allowed to help other children tidy up or get their materials. The negative interactions between Gerrit and the others disappeared. His problematic behavior disappeared and soon Gerrit was properly part of the class. None of the others were afraid of him anymore.

Years later, my grandfather met Gerrit again. He had become a truck driver. He loved being out on the road by himself. My grandfather's class was where Gerrit, for the first time in his life, had felt useful and important. But the other children in that class felt they too had contributed to something special. Gerrit never forgot that turning point in his life. Each year he would let children with behavioral problems from a local care institution drive along in his truck.

If you want your leadership to have lasting impact, sometimes you have to have guts and be willing to choose the large blade. That is, to deal with the big problem instead of beating around the bush. Reveal the problem, name it, and consider the solutions.

Which situations call for the large blade?

Firm action is called for when you're dealing with a complex problem affecting a large group of people. Words alone are not enough. Something has to change *visibly* to bring about a change in thinking and behavior; when it does, a new order emerges.

In the example of the "difficult" student, a powerful intervention was required to stir something within Gerrit, and to set the relations in the entire class into motion. Not just the boy himself, but his classmates too would often say how quickly the bully had

changed. They were surprised and even a little proud that their group had managed to achieve this! In other words – behavioral change not only impacts one person's life, but also the lives of the people around him.

For our leadership practice this means we always have to put interventions in context. It's not about a dysfunctional person on their own, but also about the people, the team they work with. The way the leader deals with that employee impacts the entire group. Please note – firm intervention is not always better. Only use the large blade when you have no other options. Before you use it, take ample time to observe what's going on and work out if radical action is indeed the best solution.

How to use it?

Cutting: offer a clear line, a vision, and make decisions based on that. The use of the large blade is visible to everyone, so act with conviction, calmly and accurately. Communicate clearly. When, after consultation and deliberation, you have reached a decision, say, "This is how we'll do it!"

Words such as "try" and "perhaps" don't go with the use of this tool. They weaken your message and leave room for doubt. In other words, don't start vacillating when you're holding the large blade.

A firm intervention calls for taking responsibility, but it doesn't mean you walk ahead of others or show them the way on your own. Leadership with impact is about daring to be decisive *and* vulnerable at the same time. Collaboration is inextricably linked to this. After all, you need more than one person to create lasting change.

What to pay attention to when using it?

The pitfall of the large blade is using it too soon or too readily. Often, your own emotions, such as impatience to get rid of the problem quickly, or fear the situation will worsen without a fast intervention, play a part in this. Led by such emotions, the knife in your hand quickly turns into an axe. Always keep in mind that there is no way back after cutting. Once you've made the wrong cut, you will have to pick up the pieces, and then the damage is already done. The trick is to wield just enough power to achieve what you want and set things in motion to bring about change without unnecessarily damaging people or situations. Be careful not to establish a culture of fear and never let change become an end in itself.

In actual practice this means that *before* you start cutting you make sure that all those concerned understand the gravity of the situation and how you want to solve the problem. Don't let organizational upheaval or others calling for urgent action rush you. Instead, allow people who seem to be part of the problem become part of the solution, just as my grandfather did with Gerrit.

Evaluate the intervention with everyone concerned by answering three questions: What went well? What do we need to stop now? What are the next steps to take? By following this timeline in the evaluation, lessons learned will be taken into account in the future, specific activities will immediately be stopped, and options will be outlined. This approach strengthens commitment and therefore sustainability.

Using the large blade: forced redundancies

In January, 2015, I became chairman of the board at Verslavingszorg Noord-Nederland (Addiction Care North-Netherlands). The organization was going through a rough time; a financial deficit of three to four million euros on a 60 million turnover was expected in 2015.

When I started, a substantial reorganization plan was ready. Part of the plan was the intended dismissal of 130 of the 1,000 employees – no wonder the work force objected. Some leaders of the resistance against the plan started attracting media attention. Stress levels rose and the crisis was complete. My first decision was to put the existing reorganization plans on hold. I needed time to observe what was going on and – in consultation with the others – think about the best solution. In short, I needed time to place the pocket knife in the palm of my hand and consider the different tools and options.

The Supervisory Board gave me two months. In the meantime, the financial risk increased by approximately 30,000 euros per week. Our backer, one of the banks, put us under extra surveillance. In addition, the law governing dismissal would become stricter as of May 1 of that year, with potentially even higher costs as a result. The internal and external pressure to quickly take firm measures was high.

The employees were relieved that I had decided to wait before acting, but their uncertainty remained. Was I just putting off the evil hour? All sorts of protest arose. The management team was stuck between the various stakeholders. All kinds of groups were trying to convince me to intervene fast and firm. But I did not let them rush me.

I decided to ask the leaders of the resistance to become my advisors. They agreed. Instead of standing opposite each oth-

er, we now stood side by side. In the meantime, behind closed doors, some managers commented unfavorably on my approach. They wondered if I hadn't brought in the Trojan horse with my resolve. I took note of their opinion and chose not to defend my decisions.

The next step was to organize meetings with employees in which everyone could help think about a different reorganization, widely supported, without forced redundancies. A large number of employees, on their own initiative, declared that they wanted to sacrifice an hour pay per week for at least a year. This immediately allowed us to keep 25 jobs. Other plans too, such as an increase in turnover by treating more clients in a shorter amount of time (shorter admissions in clinics) and offering employees further training and retraining, became part of a reorganization plan without forced redundancies.

Tips

- + Leadership in crisis means showing guts and using the large blade purposefully when the situation calls for it. Do not decide on your own, but in consultation with those involved, when it's best to cut and how to do so.
- + Leadership in times of change or crisis is not just about managing people, but also managing the concerns, the thoughts, and (strong) emotions people are dealing with, starting with your own.
- + Showing leadership is not the same as marching ahead of the troops, that is a serious misjudgment.
- + Leadership becomes more powerful when you show vulnerability; others will do the same, creating a safe, open culture.
- + Leaders using the large blade take responsibility for failure and praise others for success.

- + Leadership gives purpose and meaning to change and the way it happens, creating more and more support. This does not only apply to the planning phase, but particularly to the implementation phase. Only then does leadership have a lasting impact.

Question

Solving major issues calls for a firm approach. You will be dealing with stressful thoughts and strong emotions, both your own and those of other people. Do you have sufficient insight into your thought patterns, emotions, and responses such as fight, flee, and freeze, which can send you in the wrong direction and make your interventions too tough, too soft or nonexistent?

About the author

Gabriël Anthonio (1963), is chairman of the board of VNN (North Netherlands Addiction Care). In addition to his work as a manager, he lectures at the NHL-Stenden College and is an extraordinary professor at the RUG (University of Groningen) in leadership, organizational development, and sustainability. He started his career working with teenage dropouts in crisis shelters and on the streets, then held various management positions in, among others, a youth institution, a detention center, and in youth care. A common thread in his career is helping organizations in crisis get back on their feet. Anthonio puts leadership development into practice and inspires others to come along on his journey.

Gabriël Anthonio is a sought-after speaker at seminars, conferences, and in organizations, where he shares his ideas, theory, and practices. He appeals to directors and managers, as well as to the employees in the workplace.

“I want to demythologize leadership, take off its halo and open it up to everyone.”

In *The Swiss Army Knife for Leaders* you are inspired and challenged to follow your own path in leadership development, to take others with you on the journey, and to work on leading with a positive impact on yourself and your environment. The title of this book refers to the pocket knife of Gabriel Anthonio's grandfather – a teacher, and a great coach for old and young.

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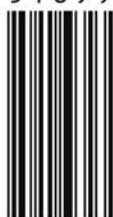
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