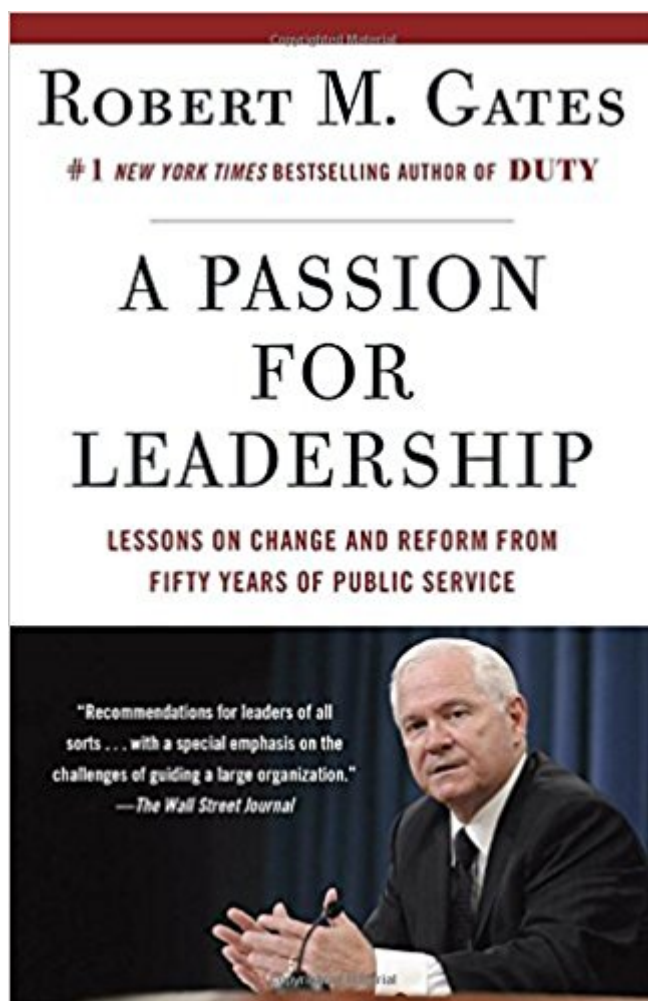


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# A Passion For Leadership: Lessons On Change And Reform From Fifty Years Of Public Service



## Synopsis

Having led change successfully at three sprawling, monumental organizations—the CIA, Texas A&M University, and the Department of Defense—Robert M. Gates offers the ultimate insider's look at how leaders can transform large organizations and companies. For many Americans, bureaucracy and corporate structure are code words for inertia. Gates knows that it doesn't have to be that way. With stunning clarity, he shares how simple plans, faithfully executed, can cut through the mire of bureaucracy to reform organizational culture. And he shows that great leaders listen and respond to their teams and embrace the power of compromise. Using the full weight of his wisdom, candor, and devotion to duty, he empowers leaders at any level to effectively implement his leadership strategies.

## Book Information

Paperback: 256 pages

Publisher: Vintage; Reprint edition (January 10, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0307949648

ISBN-13: 978-0307949646

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.8 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 124 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #73,029 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #48 in Books > Business & Money > Processes & Infrastructure > Government & Business #134 in Books > Business & Money > Processes & Infrastructure > Organizational Learning #164 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Elections & Political Process > General

## Customer Reviews

Selection, Huffington Post 5 Political Books for Insight This Election Season (2016)Selection, Publishers Weekly Business & Economics Top 10 for Fall 2015"Full of strong advice for good leadership. . . . Provides interesting insight into Gates's understanding of the impressive leadership positions he has held." —The Huffington Post"A guide to leading large institutions through reform and change. . . . [Gates] brings [his suggestions] to life through stories of his own powerful and critical leadership roles." —The Washington Post, A Nine Leadership Books to Watch for in 2016"The book [politicians] should all admit to reading—and actually read... Refreshingly nonideological... Mr. Gates preaches the value of civility, internal transparency, and

work-life balance." —The Wall Street Journal

ROBERT M. GATES served as secretary of defense under both President George W. Bush and President Barack Obama. He was also an officer in the United States Air Force and worked for the CIA before being appointed director of the agency. He served eight presidents of both political parties and was a member of the National Security Council staff in four administrations. He was president of Texas A&M University from 2002 to 2006, is currently chancellor of the College of William & Mary, was named president of the Boy Scouts of America in 2013, and has served on several corporate boards of directors.

Robert Gates is a government executive of renown. He has been effective as Director of the CIA, as national security advisor, as President of Texas A&M and as Secretary of Defense. Harsh words are seldom spoken about Bob Gates's competence or intellect. In *A Passion for Leadership*, Gates he gives us a dazzling display of a uniquely American philosophical foundation as a tool for leadership. He can write. This is a very good and valuable book. *A Passion for Leadership* is a tell-all, a how-to tale that weaves chapter and verse of how to effectively lead and manage vast, complex organizations. It provides the link between convictions and actions in several layers and over time, and Gates did a fabulous job at helping the reader navigate the levels of abstraction, the second and third order effects of seemingly simple solutions to American problems. It goes beyond *Duty*, his last book, to tell how one takes a foundation of reason and reality based convictions to a series of specific actions in specific circumstances within the amorphous bounds of those convictions. Gates is one of very few legendarily effective government executives. Perhaps the broad performance canvas he earned and inherited allowed him to develop more nuanced leadership skills than others who were constrained by narrower bounds. For example, another of those quietly famous leaders is Admiral James Loy, who rose from the Coast Guard Academy to be Commandant, then the President of the "go-to" guy to manage change in the vastly complex intersection of politics, government and management. Loy built TSA from scratch after the 9/11 disaster changed the way we fly and then built from scratch again as Deputy in the new Department of Homeland Security. Loy managed change well and described in his writings how to do it, step by step. Managing change consumed Loy's time, but in each job his decisions suffered a layer or two of bureaucracy between him and the President, including those tiresome vetting and approving minions who served the President as staff. Inevitably, even perhaps by design, that extra time for staff approval slowed

the execution of Loy's visions; Gates suffered far less of that. Loy was required to keep his head down to manage complex change in government; Gates was required to look up in his intelligence and national security roles to report and anticipate. In Gates's career, the confluence of his roles provided deep opportunity to observe behavior and multiple orders of unplanned effects. His observations are delivered with grace and wit.

Gates's background ran from Director of the CIA, to national security advisor, to President of Texas A&M, to Secretary of Defense, and he tells a moving tale of those experiences. Both Loy and Gates write well on leadership, but Gates has been challenged more broadly, so perhaps writes with broader exposure and perspective on the various problems of leadership, albeit with less specificity than Loy's *P to the seventh power* (proper prior planning prevents piss-poor performance.) Gates may also have had time to observe Loy's success and generalize the lessons. It was Gates's job to watch, learn and confirm. It seems he did those things well, among others. Gates's leadership canvas broadened when he slipped from one bureaucracy into another, leaving government to become President of Texas A&M University. Gates was charged with leading an effective effort to regain A&M's academic stature. University politics are legendarily vicious, but the faculty activists there were over matched in the multi-year scrum that followed. Gates provides an executive primer on the utility of building on a foundation of moral principles and values. It's great theater. Gates's time after A&M, when he returned to the US government as Secretary of Defense under George W. Bush, is the capstone of both his career and this book. Consider the challenges of being the only cabinet member to serve in the transition from Bush to Obama, from conservative Republican to liberal Democrat, then observe as Gates negotiates those shoals. Again, it is marvelous theater. Gates is a wonderful storyteller who weaves his powerful characters into compelling discussions of the problems of the world. He skillfully posits solutions and resultant actions within those discussions. The word among admired government executives is, "Bob Gates is one of the good guys." His book certainly reflects that. *A Passion for Leadership* is a timeless work of leadership and management genius. Read it. Robert E. Cook, author of *Pulse* *Pulse: The third of the Cooch adventures in national security* (The Cooch series of national security thrillers Book 3)

Robert Gates led three unique organizations- a spy agency, a major university, and an outfit running two wars. With no formal leadership training except for the Boy Scouts, Gates was apparently

successful and he offers his perspectives and advice on transformative leadership with keen insights and the right touch of humor.

This is not a political book. It is a non academic book about how to eliminate bureaucracy in the private and public sectors. Gates uses his experiences and provides examples from his time leading the Defense Department, CIA, and Texas A&M. His objective was to make transformation changes in all 3 institutions. If you are interested in this topic (which is probably why you are reading this review) then it is worth the read. The things he tried are a good review for leaders who have an "agenda for change". I enjoyed some of the quotes he gave from past leaders and reading about his perspective of critical issues the country faced during his tenures.

Duty was a great book and so is, A Passion For Leadership. The latter should be read after reading John C. Maxwell's , The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership. The two books go hand in hand. I wish they had been written when I was 21 instead of 61. Very few young people are exposed to leadership. They see management and do not understand the difference. I worked as a Department of the Army civilian employee for over 36 years. I saw very few people during my entire career that did not put the mission first, IMHO, Mr. Fukuyama is incorrect. During my last four years of service, we followed Colonel Pete Blaber's philosophy, " The Mission, The Men and Me". Robert Gates would make an extremely good President, much better than the current candidates on either side of the table.

Gates outlines the leadership principles that he filled in the three most prestigious assignments in his career. What is unique is the approach differs in many ways in these public sector jobs from leadership in the private sector. His writing style makes each approach easy to understand and the anecdotes to illustrate each principle are interesting and appropriate. As a retired college administrator I appreciate his genius and effective leadership. The book should be on every not for profit administrator's reading list.

As someone who has taught strategic leadership to senior military and civilian leaders for many years, I can attest that this is probably the most useful book for anyone leading a large, governmental organization. Few leadership books focus on the strategic level, and those that do are almost always geared towards corporate leadership. That's this book's competitive advantage. It offers practical, honest, and humorous suggestions that, as an organizational psychologist, are

almost always supported by empirical research, even though Secretary Gates has probably not read any of the research. He's a natural strategic leader, a rare commodity.

He is right, this country needs more leaders who will step up and lead the way. If higher management and mid level management at my company read this book and applied some of the principles from Mr. Gates, my company would be stronger in the leadership category. I have learned a lot by just observing managers. They have taught me what not to do. I learned a lot from this book, many years of experience passed down to help a younger man like myself, thank you! There was some large words in this book. Not a bad thing since kindle has built in dictionary. All in all I have lots of highlights. This book has also given me the interest in reading about past presidents. I recommend this book.

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